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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most complex activities children engage in during their school careers. This book provides teachers with the knowledge and ideas they need to increase their effectiveness when instructing students in writing. The book blends together practical, easy-to-implement, classroom-tested lessons and activities based on research. It is divided into four sections: Section I includes a description of a classroom in which excellent writing thrives. It provides tips on: how to create positive writing experiences; the teacher's role and responsibilities; classroom set-up; and time management. Section II provides: an explanation of the different stages of the writing process; instructional strategies to support struggling learners; and an abundance of suggestions for creating and using supporting activities. Section III includes: information on the importance of journal writing; and ideas about reading and writing as transitional processes. Section IV presents the various problems some students may be experiencing when asked to write. Each scenario is accompanied by: student writing samples; an analysis of each sample; questions for the teacher to ask herself/himself about the classroom writing process; teaching strategies; and classroom modifications to assist those who struggle. The book includes a How-to-Use-This-Book section and task analysis icons for specific writing skills. (Contains a glossary, 26 children's literature titles, 17 professional works cited, and 8 additional bibliographic titles.) (NKA)

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Strategies for Teaching Struggling Writers

Debbie Lesure
and Katie Richardson

CS 510 844

Help Me Learn TO WRITE

Help Me Learn To WRITE

Strategies for Teaching Struggling Writers

by

Debbie Lesure

and

Katie Richardson

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Student names that appear on or in reference to student-authored writing samples or sample worksheets found within the book are fictional.

Dedication

To my husband, George, who, after 26 years of marriage, still trusts that I can do anything I set my mind to and gives me the freedom and encouragement to do so.

To my daughter Bethany, who has caught my love for working with children and is entering into the field of environmental education.

To my son, Paul, for his willingness to share with us his experiences as a young struggling writer and give insight into helping other children achieve.

To my daughter Becca, for her endless patience as Mom spent countless evenings and weekends involved in research and writing.

—Debbie Lesure

To my husband, Irv, for his unending stream of ideas and unfailing faith in me.

To my son, Jamie, for his patience and expertise in the technological aspects of this project.

To my daughter, Amanda, for her constant encouragement and ability to bring me back from theory to reality.

—Katie Richardson

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We would like to acknowledge all the teachers in our lives
who instilled in us a desire to be lifelong learners.

We would also like to recognize all the students
who continue to teach us new lessons daily.

—Debbie Lesure and Katie Richardson

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most complex activities children engage in during their school careers. Yet some teachers and parents jump to unfair conclusions about poor or reluctant writers:

"He should try harder."

"She doesn't like to write."

"This kid is so unmotivated."

"This student is such a good reader. He's just lazy about writing."

Help Me Learn to Write will provide you with the knowledge and ideas you need to increase your effectiveness when instructing students in writing. After all, *asking* students to write is very different from *teaching* students to write.

This book is divided into four sections:

Section I includes a description of a classroom in which excellent writing thrives. This section provides tips on:

- how to create positive writing experiences
- the teacher's role and responsibilities
- classroom set-up
- time management

Section II provides:

- an explanation of the different stages of the writing process
- instructional strategies to support struggling learners
- an abundance of suggestions for creating and using supporting activities

Section III includes:

- information on the importance of journal writing
- ideas about reading and writing as transitional processes

Section IV presents the various problems some students may be experiencing when asked to write. Each scenario is accompanied by:

- student writing samples
- an analysis of each sample
- questions for you to ask yourself about your classroom writing process
- teaching strategies
- classroom modifications to assist those who struggle

"**Digging Deeper**," also included in this section, will help increase your understanding of why a student may struggle with a particular skill or cognitive function.

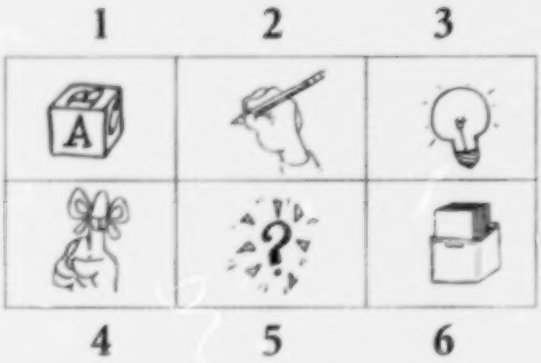
How to Use This Book

Help Me Learn to Write is not the kind of book you have to read cover to cover. Rather, it is a reference for you to consult whenever you are puzzled by why a student is frustrated, why a student's writing lacks fluency, or why a student seems unable to get all those "wonderful ideas that you know are *in there*" out of his head and onto the paper. Read first to discover what the student's problem might be, then find out what *you* can do to help increase that student's effectiveness as a writer.

Task Analysis Icons

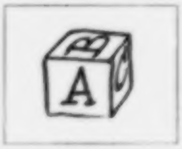
Writing requires the rapid and simultaneous melding of cognitive skills and abilities, and teachers and parents need to understand how complex and involved this procedure really is. To support this theory, Dr. Mel Levine (1994), director of the Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has identified and labeled a task analysis of writing—a breakdown of specific skills and cognitive functions that must be integrated in order for good writing to occur. These functions include:

1. Language and Reading Ability
2. Motor Skills
3. Ideation
4. Memory
5. Problem-Solving
6. Organization



Below, take a brief look at how each of these functions impacts the writing process. The icons that accompany these functions (see above list) appear throughout the text and will help you identify one or more areas in which a student may be struggling.

Language and Reading Ability: Reading and writing are closely linked, but we do not use the same learning processes when we read as when we write. For instance, we learn how to become a writer from the books we read; another writer's work becomes a model on which we base our own writing. At the same time, we learn more about reading by means of the discoveries we make about language as we write. In general, however, good readers possess strong command of our language. Vocabulary is often one of their strengths, and they have most likely read a variety of genres on which to model their writing. Writes Dr. Mel Levine, "Students who are good readers have a stronger likelihood of being effective writers" (1994).



Teachers also need to give consideration to the impact language skills have on a student's ability to write individual sounds, words, sentences, and paragraphs. If a student has weak language skills, it can severely impact a student's ability to understand and use the conventions of our language.

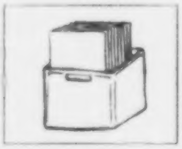
Motor Skills: To write effectively and efficiently, students must be able to form letters quickly and easily. Unfortunately, not all students are able to control their fine-motor functions.

No doubt you have observed students who grip the body of the pencil with their entire hand. For students with poor fine-motor control, writing with the large muscles of the forearm may offer better control of the pencil than is possible with use of the small muscles of their fingers. Other students with finger agnosia struggle with a poor awareness of where their fingers are in space. These students often keep their faces close to the page, watching their fingers and the pencil point, practices that hinder the student's ability to write down fluent, continuous thoughts.

Ideation: Some students may have difficulty with choosing, developing, and elaborating on their ideas about a topic. In addition, they may have trouble including prior background knowledge, and thinking creatively and imaginatively. Students with weak ideation may demonstrate terse and abbreviated writing.

Memory: The demands on memory during writing are enormous, and for many struggling writers, attempting to remember one process may interfere with recalling another. For example, students may have difficulty retaining which details they want to include in a piece while trying to remember how to spell a particular word. These students have a tendency to lose track of what they are doing. If such demands start to overload a student's memory, she may produce writing that is short, disorganized, and inconsistent in quality.

Problem Solving: Students who demonstrate difficulty with problem solving may have trouble planning what to write about and knowing how to proceed with their writing in an organized manner. They may work too quickly or too slowly. These students may not reflect sufficiently on the task at hand in order to consider the depth and breadth of their writing. Time management is also an issue.



Organization: Students who are disorganized when it comes to writing may have difficulty finding materials as basic as pencil and paper or locating research materials and advance organizers needed for their writing project. They may not understand how to begin or how to proceed in a sequential manner. Students with organizational difficulties may feel overwhelmed when asked to write, and, as a result, produce very little work.

Students who struggle with writing tend to develop an aversion to it. Students burdened by social or personal issues may also develop such an aversion. In *Children's Writing Perspectives from Research*, the authors (Dahl and Farnum 1998) suggest that any student can become a reluctant writer for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Fear of being laughed at
2. Not knowing where to start
3. Not having any interest in the topic

Since we have determined that aversion is another reason students struggle with writing, we have included it as a separate area of difficulty in Section IV.

Students who are challenged in one or more areas of this task analysis will find it difficult to hide problems in their writing. They may feel vulnerable when asked to read their work or feel bad about the legibility and/or content of their writing. Children compare themselves to others and are usually their own worst critics. What they need is sensitivity, caring, and *instruction*.

STUDENT GEM

"When the class gave me compliments I felt like a Teddy bear being hugged."

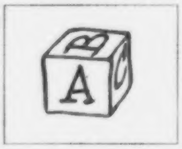
—Jackson, Grade 3

This book includes a variety of instructional methods, lessons, and activities for all stages of the writing process and for all students, especially those who are struggling. Stages include:

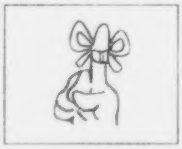
- Brainstorming (see pages 19, 35–64)
- Organizing/Researching (see pages 19–20, 65–88)
- Composing/Drafting (see pages 20, 89–114)
- Sharing/Conferencing/Feedback (see pages 20, 115–118)
- Rewriting/Revising (see pages 21, 119–144)
- Editing (see pages 21, 145–151)
- Final Draft/Publishing (see pages 21, 152–156)

After you have provided the necessary instruction, students can complete some of these activities independently. Remember, however, to modify activities for students for whom writing is a challenge. Below is a sampling of possible modifications:

- If a student has difficulty with the physical act of writing, assign a class recorder or a writing-buddy to record his ideas.



- Write on an overhead projector during group think-alouds. Everyone will benefit from hearing and seeing this classroom conversation.



- Reproduce students' ideas by storing them in individual writing folders. Enlarge and transfer other ideas to a wall chart for easy access.

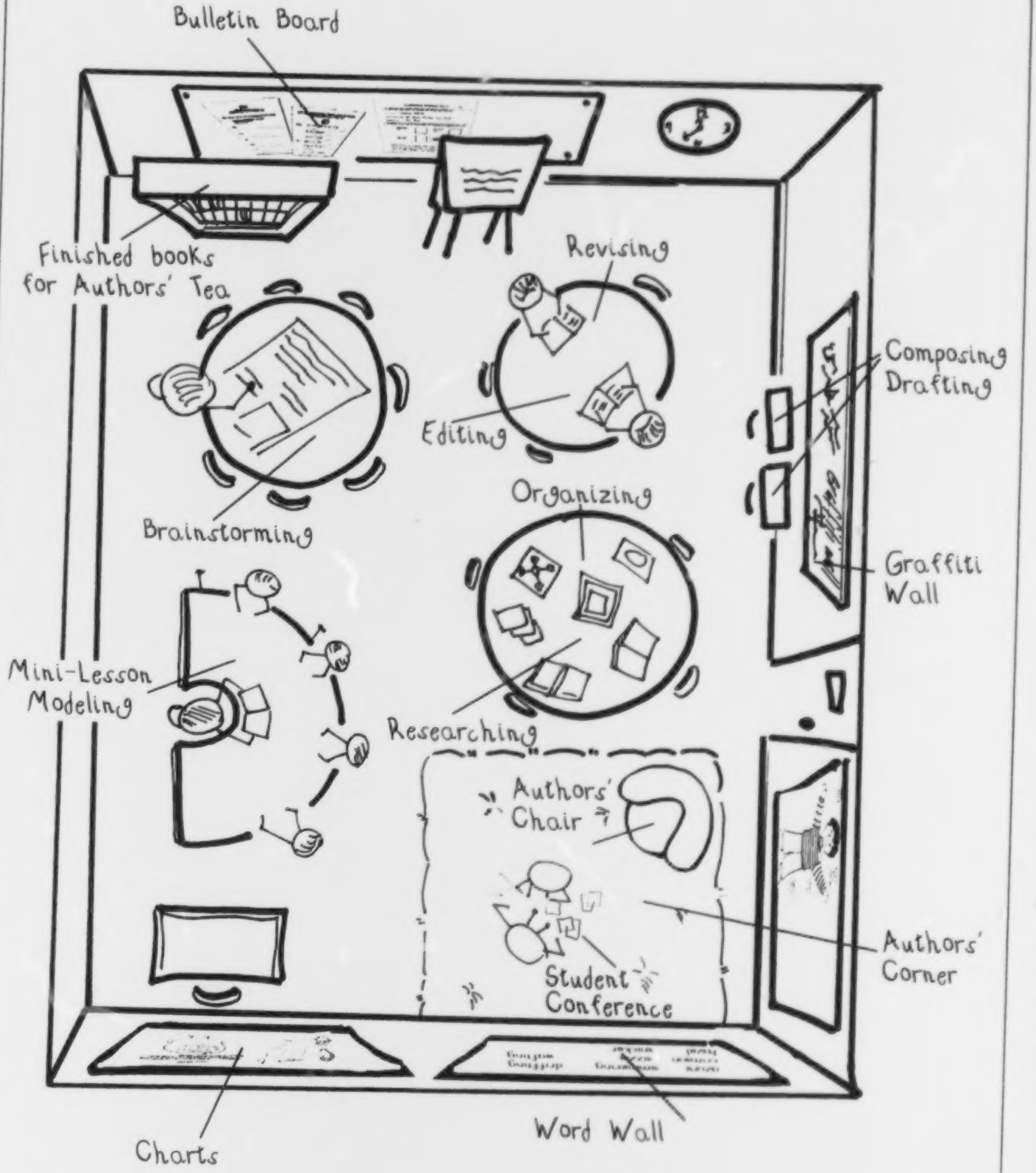
These and many other strategies listed in this book will help students with memory weaknesses retain their thoughts and broaden their vocabulary. You can adapt most of these instructional strategies for individual students and groups of different sizes.

A Word of Caution

We would like to caution teachers to be careful about thinking a particular strategy will help all your struggling writers. As teachers we must strive to understand each of our student's learning needs. Only then can we differentiate our instruction to promote individualized learning within the larger classroom environment.

Remember: Keep this book on your desk and refer to it when you pick up a piece of student writing so unorganized you can't follow the ideas or so illegible you can't even begin to read it. Refer to this when you hear a student say, "I don't have anything to write about" or, "I can't write!" Teaching someone to write is teaching her to think. It's an opportunity to help a young person develop the skills it takes to discover what she feels and then how to communicate those feelings and thoughts to others in an organized, clear, and sometimes beautiful way.

"A good teacher must be able to put himself in the place of those who find learning hard."
—Eliphas Levi


Bulletin Board
Finished books for Authors' Tea
Revising
Composing
Drafting
Editing
Brainstorming
Organizing
Graffiti Wall
Mini-Lesson Modeling
Researching
Authors' Chair
Authors' Corner
Student Conference
Charts
Word Wall

SECTION I

WHAT GOOD WRITING LOOKS LIKE IN AN INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOM

Pretend you are visiting an outstanding classroom where the teacher and students are working eagerly and productively on their writing assignments. You observe several different activities occurring simultaneously: some students, for example, are writing, some are thinking or reading, while others are researching and sharing, typing a list of topic ideas, or talking quietly.

Student Experiences

If you take a closer look at these students you will notice they are each working on one of the stages in the writing process described in the paragraphs below.

Brainstorming

Students who need an opportunity to get as many ideas as possible "out of their heads" and down onto a piece of paper are brainstorming. They are trying either to find a topic or perhaps generate details about the topic they have already chosen. Many of the thoughts "storming out of their brains" are random, lack sequence, or are in the form of a list. The form is not important, however, because what matters is that the ideas, thoughts, and feelings "spill out" onto the paper where the students can examine, manipulate, and organize them. (See pages 35–64 for more information.)

Researching

For students who are writing a piece of nonfiction or who need to research some factual information to incorporate into their stories, you see them using the computer to search the Internet, reading an encyclopedia and taking notes, or interviewing another person for more information. Students can work alone or with a partner and can do this research for a few minutes or for a few days. (See pages 65–88 for more information.)

Organizing

Some students are working at a table, sorting their information and placing it into an advance organizer. All students need to learn how to use an outline, web, or other structure to help organize their ideas before trying to compose a piece of writing. Some students find these systems more helpful than others, but *all* students benefit from being exposed to various methods with which to organize their ideas. (See pages 65–88 for more information.)

Composing/Drafting

In another area of the room you notice some students writing quietly. Writers of all ages need consistent blocks—approximately 20 minutes of uninterrupted time each day—during which they can write. Introduce an SSW (Sustained Silent Writing) time for at least 10 of those minutes. Having this quiet block of time allows students to focus and get into the flow of their writing. Don't let them become overly concerned about neatness, spelling, or punctuation at this point in their writing, however. They can work on those areas during the editing stage. (See pages 89–114 for more information.)

Sharing/Conferencing

You notice some students talking quietly with the teacher. They are laughing, asking questions, and discussing their writing pieces as part of a writing conference. This writing conference is the students' chance to connect with an audience, and they are using this opportunity to seek an opinion or give feedback to one another.

It is necessary for writers to share with the teacher, another student, a small group of students, or the entire class at various points along the path to a finished piece of writing. It is important to teach each student how to get the feedback that he needs by telling the listeners what it is that he is struggling with or excited about. It is also an important time for the teacher to use helpful questioning techniques. (See page 118 for a list of sample questions to use when discussing a child's writing; see pages 115–118 for more information on sharing/conferencing.)

Rewriting/Revising

Students need to go back and change their wording, insert more detail, or eliminate unnecessary information as many times as is needed to effectively say what they mean. Therefore, it is not surprising you see a student cutting up his paper and then taping it back together! This particular revision strategy is called "cut and paste." The students can also learn how to "cut and paste" on the computer, and they should feel free to cross out, use carets (^), arrows, stars, and any other symbol that will help them change and improve their writing. After all, this is their first draft, a work in progress. An effective writing teacher should occasionally model this process on her own writing, letting students see the problem-solving, decision-making, and even the *frustration* that goes into revising a piece of writing. (See page 119–144 for more information on revising.)

Editing

In another area of the room you see a student sitting at a table with a checklist next to her, looking from her work to the list and then back again. She is editing her writing piece.

After revising the content of their writing, students should be held responsible for reviewing their own work very carefully and fixing any mechanical errors they might have made. It works well to keep an editing checklist in the back of each student's writing folder. Be sure to hold writers accountable for using any skills they have mastered. (See page 146 for a sample skills list; see pages 145–151 for more information on editing.)

Presenting a Final Project/Published Piece

Writing has more meaning for students if their best work can somehow be presented for others to read. It is for this reason you see students sewing the pages into a book, illustrating a story, framing a poem, or addressing an envelope to a children's magazine! Publishing can take a variety of forms. Students can make actual published books, hold an "Authors' Tea," type a fiction or nonfiction piece to send into a magazine for publication, or perform an original play! You and your students can conjure up a variety of interesting and fun ideas for how to publish student work. Writing only for the teacher's eyes is not very motivating for most students. We write in order to share what we think and feel. Therefore, publishing and presenting is an important part of the writing process!

Teacher Responsibilities

In this same classroom you see the teacher actively involved in the writing process. Her role is one of coach, nudging students toward their goals and deciding when it's appropriate to take time out from "the game" to review, practice, or learn a new skill. On some days she works on her own writing piece, on other days you see her talking with a student or with a group of students, conducting a mini-lesson, evaluating the children's work, reading a student-made book, or listening intently. Good writing teachers are very respectful listeners, keeping in mind that the student needs to feel ownership and have control over his own writing.

Instructional Practices

Teachers should be familiar with each student's strengths and weaknesses and teach skills accordingly. Teachable moments offer spur-of-the-moment opportunities to instruct a student(s) in one or more skill areas. Of course we also need to *teach* spelling, mechanics, and effective writing techniques to groups of students on a regular basis. Children learn *some* things by watching and listening to their peers, but most of them need *direct instruction* in order to learn about the conventions we all use when we write. They also need to be told about the qualities that will make their writing effective. These things can be done using a variety of teaching methods.

Mini-Lessons

At one point during this writing time you watch as the teacher writes on chart paper or on a whiteboard, demonstrating a mechanical skill and modeling how to write a good lead. Since it is the teacher who knows her students' needs best, it is her responsibility to decide not only *what* to teach her students about writing, but also whether to conduct a lesson with the whole class or with a small group. She also needs to decide *how long* the lesson needs to be and *how often* to hold these sessions. Most teachers try to keep the lesson short (five to ten minutes) and meet with the students two or three times a week for the purpose of instruction.

Modeling

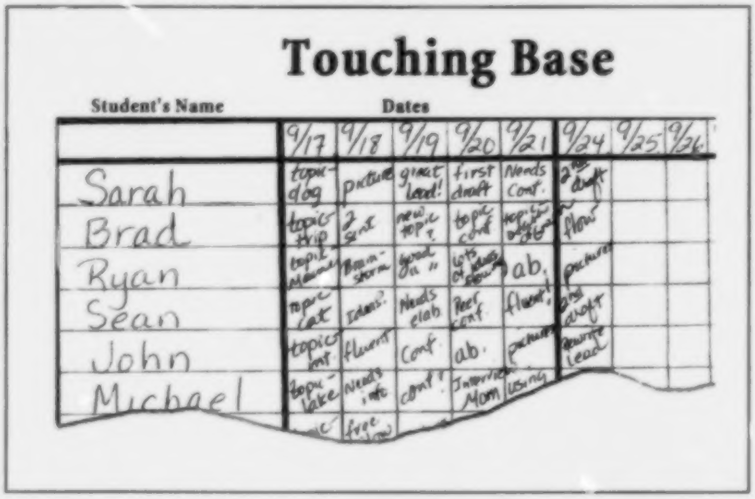
Writing teachers need to write! As you look around a room filled with young authors, you see the teacher writing her own piece. Her students need to see her writing, thinking, sharing, struggling with word choice, and smiling when she succeeds! An effective teaching method is for the teacher to put her work up on an overhead projector and then work on it in front of her students, thinking aloud about her ideas, feelings, problems, and choices. Writing on chart paper also works. Children love hearing about their teacher's life, be it a memory from her own childhood, a story about a pet, or a funny adventure!

Conferences

At another time during the writing period you see the teacher sitting with a student, discussing something about that student's piece of writing. The teacher listens, nods, and laughs. At one point she sits quietly and listens as the child shares a sad moment. The teacher then asks thought-provoking, respectful questions to help guide the student and give some direction to his writing. If the student were at the editing stage, you might see the two of them working on the mechanics of the piece using an interactive writing style. The teacher would be prodding the child to do everything he could do independently, circling words to check, adding letters, and discussing good word choice. You might see the teacher pointing to the bookshelf where the Spellex word finders*, *Write Source 2000***, and thesauruses are kept, as she suggests to the student that he use a resource to check some of his work.

Later on in the writing period the teacher walks around the room with a clipboard, briefly checking with each student to find out in which stage he or she is working. Since students are working at their own pace, one person might be composing a first draft while the child next to her is drawing the illustrations for a published piece.

Keeping track of where everyone is working is called "touching base" or checking on the status of the class. In either case, the teacher is just jotting down what the student is doing that day. (An example of what that looks like is at the right. For a sheet to use in your class, see page 25.)



Touching Base

Student's Name	9/17	9/18	9/19	9/20	9/21	9/24	9/25	9/26
Sarah	topic-dog	picture	great lead!	first draft	Needs Conf.	2nd draft		
Brad	topic-trip	2 sent	new topic?	topic conf	[illegible]	flow		
Ryan	topic-Mom	Brain-storm	good " "	lots of ideas flow	ab.	picture		
Sean	topic-cat	Ideas?	Needs elab	Peer conf.	fluent!	2nd draft		
John	topic-int.	fluent	Conf.	ab.	picture	rewrite lead		
Michael	topic-lake	Needs info	conf!	Interview Mom	using			
	[illegible]	free flow						

---

* A Spellex is a student reference book containing lists of root words, with the spelling of different forms of the words, i.e., different tenses of verbs, suffixes added, etc. It is published by Curriculum Associates.

** *Write Source 2000* is a student writer's resource book published by Harcourt Brace.

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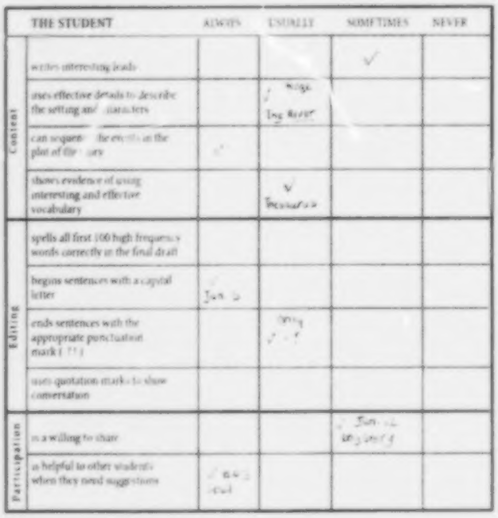
Conferences are often held with individuals, but they are also important for small groups or the entire class. The teacher is still using the same teaching strategies: she smiles, listens, and asks helpful questions. She is also responsible for keeping accurate records about what has happened at the conferences so students remember their next step on the following day and can, therefore, be held accountable for following through. Index cards, kept on a ring, or sticky notes handed to a child to put right on her page at the conclusion of a conference are good ways to manage this task.

Evaluation/Assessment

Knowing what your students are capable of writing is essential in order to set realistic and meaningful goals for them. Goal-setting most often takes place during a student-teacher conference in answer to the question "What's the *next step*?" What is it that the student is ready to try? What bit of information or example can you share with that student to nudge him along to better writing?

Looking back into our model classroom you see a sheet of paper lying on the teacher's desk. This particular sheet is a rubric. A rubric is a chart that lists specific, observable skills for both mechanics and content, and it is used to assess student work. The teacher uses the rubric to record whether or not the student has shown that he has mastered each targeted skill. Rubrics provide a clear, visual method by which to note student progress over the course of the school year. Behaviors are noted on a regular basis. It can be done monthly, quarterly, or each trimester, depending on your school calendar and your need to keep track of your students. Rubrics are also very helpful when reporting progress to parents. The visual format makes it easy to see how a child is progressing.



	THE STUDENT	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Content	writes interesting leads			✓	
	uses effective details to describe the setting and characters		✓ [illegible]		
	can sequence the events in the plot of the story	✓			
	shows evidence of using interesting and effective vocabulary		✓ [illegible]		
Editing	spells all first 100 high frequency words correctly in the final draft				
	begins sentences with a capital letter	✓ Jan 5			
	ends sentences with the appropriate punctuation mark (.?!)		[illegible] ✓		
	uses quotation marks to show conversation				
Participation	is a willing to share			✓ Jan 12 [illegible]	
	is helpful to other students when they need suggestions	✓ [illegible]			

There are many ways to set up a rubric. The standards you would use to evaluate your students' writing depend on the skills and techniques you have taught and the expectations outlined by your school district and state department of education. Find out what the standards are in your district by contacting your building principal or your district's curriculum supervisor. (See page 26 for a fourth grade writing rubric.)

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Touching Base

Student Name	Dates									

Fourth Grade Writing Rubric

	THE STUDENT ...	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Content	writes interesting leads				
	uses effective details to describe the setting and characters				
	can sequence the events in the plot of the story				
	shows evidence of using interesting and effective vocabulary				
Editing	spells all first 100 high-frequency words correctly in the final draft				
	begins sentences with a capital letter				
	ends sentences with the appropriate punctuation mark (. ? !)				
	uses quotation marks to show conversation				
Participation	is willing to share				
	is helpful to other students when they need suggestions				

Time Management

Creating enough time in your daily class schedule for writing is very important. Take a minute to look at the schedule on the whiteboard. For today, the teacher has planned on a 50-minute writing block, but if you could take a look at her plan book, you would notice she has scheduled writing *every day*! It is an accepted fact that teachers are under a great deal of pressure to fit too many things into too little time, but unless writing happens consistently (at least four times a week for 30 to 50 minutes a session) the program won't work. None of the students will be able to function as an effective writer, and it will be next to impossible for the children who struggle with this skill to construct a good piece of writing. Writers need to be able to depend on a regular time to write.

In her book *Conversations*, Regie Routman explains it this way: "Without a predictable time in which to write every day, students cannot sustain interest and momentum." One 12-year-old girl's comments about the time she was given to write in school echoes the same need. She said that her "writing was better if [she] could gradually build [her] story, layer by layer, letting it settle, and then adding more the next day, rather than trying to do it all at once or mostly at home." Similarly, a sophomore in high school, remembering his years in fourth and fifth grade, said, "It was hard to get a flow going if I never knew when or for how long I'd be able to write. Having a regular schedule made it so that I could plan."

Donald Graves, in his book *A Fresh Look at Writing*, explains the importance of instituting a consistent writing schedule. He states: "[A]s our data on children shows, when writers write every day, they begin to compose even when they are not composing. They enter into a 'constant state of composition.' "

Wouldn't it be great if our students could feel and act like authors throughout their day, thinking about how their ideas and experiences could enrich their most recent piece of writing? For some of your students, the number of issues surrounding lack of motivation and not knowing what to write would diminish, allowing them to steadily grow into effective writers! Giving your students the gift of enough time to compose, reconsider, rewrite, think, share, and then think again will help them invest more fully in their writing. It is only at that point, in conjunction with good writing instruction, that students can work to their potential as they discover who they are, what they think, and how they feel.

A Constant State of Composition

It was Kristen's turn to share again today. She always makes us laugh! We heard more about the adventures of her cat Binky. Her introduction was really interesting. She told us about how she got the ideas for her story. (I had asked the student readers to try to explain their source of inspiration for us.) She said that she had been getting ready for bed when Binky entered her room. He gave her one of those "all-knowing" cat looks and then vanished into her closet. Kristen said that ideas for a story about Binky's secret life in a world beyond her closet began flowing through her mind. She grabbed the closest piece of paper (which happened to be her math homework sheet, but oh well . . . !) and began writing frantically! She compared those few moments of writing with those of a very thirsty traveler coming to a stream of clear water and just "going crazy" trying to drink as much as possible while the opportunity was still there. She knew the ideas would fade. A door had opened up to give her a glimpse into the story, but would close again soon. She tried to scribble as much as she could, mostly just in phrases.

Kristen brought those ideas into class with her today and spent the 30-minute writing block trying to write them in story form. It's still a rough draft, but she's so enthusiastic and energized!

How would she have felt if I had cancelled writing today? I'm realizing again that writing needs to be consistent and writers need to be able to depend on a consistent schedule. Kristen's writing and her ideas seem to be in a constant state of development and discovery. It's not just a school thing anymore!

Writing Is Important: Classroom Set-Up

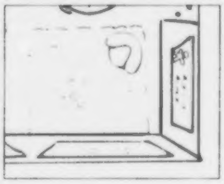
Classroom set-up and management are vital to a positive writing experience. Students can easily judge just how important writing *is* in their classroom by how the teacher places the furniture and by how she sets up and adheres to the class schedule. In a classroom where good writing occurs, the evidence is overwhelming. When the teacher values writing, the students learn to be great writers!

TEACHER ATTENTION ⟷ STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Since learning does not *just* happen because of what teachers say, it is important to teach through *doing*. As such:

- Create a well-organized and attractive area in the classroom for use during the writing time.
- Post a schedule in an easy-to-locate area of the room. The schedule should allow time for students to write *each day*.
- Track students' progress on their various writing assignments.
- Keep plenty of resources and materials on hand for students to use during writing time.
- Celebrate students' work with attractive displays.
- Research and post information on authors who have been professionally published.

Below are several ideas to consider when building a positive, stimulating, and instructive writing environment, a classroom in which writing clearly matters to the teacher and her students.



- **Author's Chair:** A comfortable and distinctive, easy-to-clean chair placed in a special area of the classroom.

- **Student Author of the Week/Month:** Designate a classroom bulletin board for your "Student Author of the Week" (or month, depending on how often you want to choose). Include on this bulletin board a photograph of the student author, a short biography (preferably written by a peer in the class), a list of pieces she has written, and tape recordings of the author's stories. Students who have difficulty with writing often have trouble seeing themselves as "real authors." This recognition will help boost the self-esteem of all student writers, but is especially important for those who struggle.

- **Published Professional Author:** Organize a display that features some information about a *professional,* published author (Roald Dahl or Katherine Paterson, for instance). Include lists of his or her books, copies of the books, books on tape, as well as biographical information. This author could be chosen by the "Student Author of the Week/Month" or by the teacher.

- **Reference Materials:** Set aside bookshelves to organize reference materials such as dictionaries, thesauruses, Spellex word finders, and *Write Source 2000.* Students will need a mini-lesson to introduce the resources available so they know how to use them independently as the need arises. (See page 195 for a list of helpful classroom resources.)

- **Lists:** Around the room, hang charts and lists generated during class discussions and mini-lessons. These could include ideas about topic choices, which have been organized into categories, the different genres (e.g., mysteries, biographies, etc.), with brief descriptions of each, a collection of strong verbs (*scampered* instead of *ran* or *murmured* instead of *said*), suggestions about ways to create catchy leads, or samples of similes and metaphors. (See page 39–40 for list activities.)

- **Alphabet Strip:** This visible reference is great for those students still struggling with letter formation. Consider purchasing individual, desk-size alphabet strips, too.

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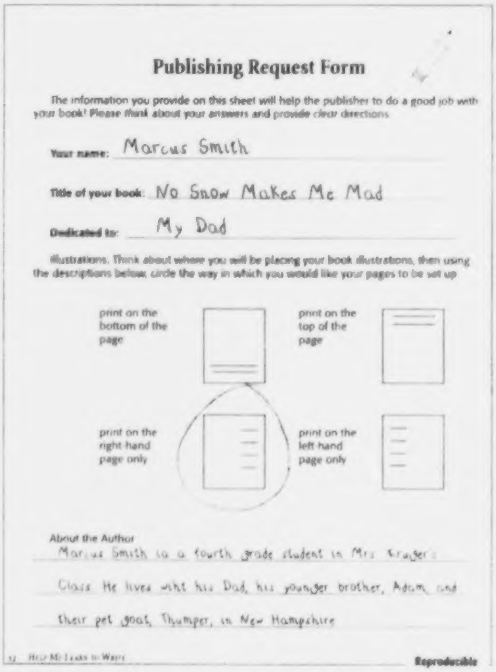
- **High-Frequency Words:** Post a chart with lists of high-frequency words, which students should be free to check at any time during their writing process. This is one way to support students who have difficulty with spelling. (See page 39 for more about lists.)

- **Writing Materials:** Keep a variety of writing utensils accessible for students who struggle with the physical act of writing.

  Store writing materials in the baskets on easy-to-reach shelves. Materials might include different styles of paper, especially helpful for students who experience difficulties with fine-motor coordination. Paper styles would most likely include plain paper, lined, lined with a dotted midline, and sheets of different colors for those students who are sensitive to reading black-on-white under fluorescent lights. Also available is a supply of different types of writing utensils and pencil grips. Some students who have motor difficulties are most successful with fat or triangular-shaped pencils or pens. The Bic Wide Body pen is a favorite with some students whose hands usually ache after only a few minutes of writing. (See pages 92–94 for more information on writing supplies.)

- **Publishing Supplies:** In this same area you can also store publishing supplies. Such supplies might include: illustrating tools (paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils) and materials needed for making book covers (cardboard, contact paper, wallpaper, book tape, needles, thread, glue, labels, etc.).

- **Conference Sign-Up Sheet and Publishing Request Forms:** Designate an area where students can request either a content conference or an editing conference. Also, when a student has *finished* his piece of writing, he can fill out a Publishing Request Form (see page 32), which gives the teacher all the information she needs in order to type the writing piece in the format the student prefers. This is also a good way to record biographical and professional information about the author, which can be incorporated into the student's published book. (See pages 21, 152–156 for more information about publishing.)



Publishing Request Form

The information you provide on this sheet will help the publisher to do a good job with your book! Please think about your answers and provide clear directions

Your name: Marcus Smith

Title of your book: No Snow Makes Me Mad

Dedicated to: My Dad

Illustrations. Think about where you will be placing your book illustrations, then using the descriptions below, circle the way in which you would like your pages to be set up

print on the bottom of the page

print on the top of the page

[✓ print on the right hand page only]

print on the left hand page only

About the Author

Marcus Smith is a fourth grade student in Mrs. Krager's Class. He lives wiht his Dad, his younger brother, Adam, and their pet goat, Thumper, in New Hampshire

32 Help Me Learn to Write

Reproducible

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Publishing Request Form

The information you provide on this sheet will help the publisher to do a good job with your book! Please *think* about your answers and provide *clear* directions.

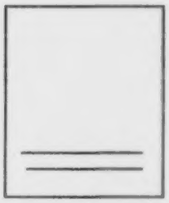
Your name: ______________________________

Title of your book: ______________________________

Dedicated to: ______________________________

Illustrations: Think about where you will be placing your book illustrations, then using the descriptions below, circle the way in which you would like your pages to be set up.

print on the bottom of the page



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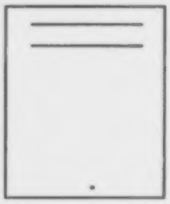
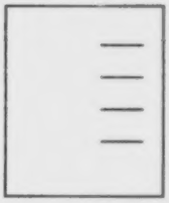
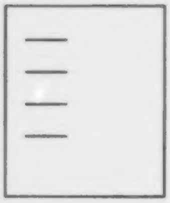


print on the right-hand page only



print on the left-hand page only



About the Author

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SECTION II

ALL CHILDREN CAN WRITE—THERE'S HELP FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE

A Teacher's Observation

Two boys sit, heads huddled together, with pages of their writing spread out between them. Both laugh quietly, fingers following excerpts of text. They scoop up their papers, and immediately I observe pencils rapidly scribbling. Many other children are busily writing, pages filling up with words flowing smoothly onto the paper. My eyes take in two girls, cross-legged on the floor, clipboards on their laps, illustrations on the floor in front of them. I see others conferencing in a small group, discussing word choices and relating their ideas to their classmates and teacher. Faces are bright . . . eyes are sparkling . . . students are focused. Clearly, this teacher has found a way to help students feel enthusiastic about their writing. . . .

Wait a minute, what is that boy doing over in the corner doodling with the colored pencils? And why is this girl crouched by the door folding her paper into tiny little squares? Why are a few children reading books? Why is one student lying upside down over in the corner? How could a teacher, who so obviously has children "charged up" about their writing, have a few children who are not involved in these activities? What's going on with those kids who aren't participating?

Later, when I speak to the teacher, I learn that she allows and, in fact, encourages reading and research during writing time. And yes, she admits, a few of her students never seem to produce much on paper, despite the fact that one is an excellent reader. She just can't get them involved. Why is it, we both wonder, that some children struggle so with writing?

Within even the best writing classrooms there will always be students who struggle while working in one or more stages of the writing process. Susie, for example, may have an abundance of exciting ideas on a topic, but she may be unable to organize them into a coherent piece of writing. Jimmy, on the other hand, may struggle to come up with details and interesting ideas to support his topic, writing very simplistic sentences and using only the most common vocabulary words and worn-out phrases. Meanwhile, Max spends most of his time trying to look busy and engaged in deep thought because the actual act of writing hurts his hand and frustrates him beyond words. Assisting your struggling students with the following teaching strategies and instructional activities for the writing process will help you provide good, clear instruction to each of your students. Strategies and activities are geared to individual learning styles and needs, providing students, as needed, with the appropriate support. It will be up to you, as their instructor, to decide which strategies you will need to use and which activities will be helpful for each individual.

Keep in mind that by the time some students have reached the intermediate grades, they can work comfortably within the writing process. We suggest you do not force these students to participate in strategies designed to help struggling writers.

Think about the soccer coach who pulls a few players out of a scrimmage game in order to have them practice a particular skill—a direct kick, passing, or blocking. Does the coach stop the *entire team* from playing and ask everyone to practice the skill, too? No, the small group that needs the instruction practices for a while and then rejoins the game. Like the soccer coach, allow your competent "players" to *stay in the game* and go through the writing process, but help the students who are struggling to improve. This section of the book will assist you in doing just that.

Brainstorming: A Gathering of Ideas and Details

"Ideas won't keep; something must be done about them."
—Alfred North Whitehead

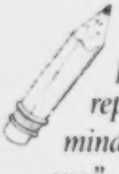
Good authors begin writing before they ever put their pencils to the paper or their fingers on the keyboard. They gather ideas throughout their lifetime, incorporating details from their lives into their compositions. Think about the author of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day* and *Alexander Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday*, both by Judith Viorst. Like all good authors, Viorst writes about what she knows best, her children: Anthony, Nicholas, and Alexander.

Even as we acknowledge this, it is necessary we require our students to write about topics they are studying. Let's say, for example, we want students to write about an animal. Would it be better to *assign* each student an animal or to *allow* a choice of animal for each student? Perhaps Peter, a 19-year-old college sophomore, summed it up best: "I have never been given a good writing assignment. I have always done best when I got to pick the topic by myself." Yet, for some students, topic selection is the hardest part of writing.

A Teacher's Observation

Writing today was heartbreaking. This was the day of the writing portion for third grade state testing. The topic was, "If you could be a famous person, who would you be?" Poor Collin. He just sat there for the whole 45 minutes looking down at his paper. I wanted to talk to him for a minute and help him think of an idea, but I'm really not allowed to help. He always struggles to begin and he always needs support. I asked Collin if he knew any famous people, trying to prod him a little. "No." And, in fact, he probably doesn't. We both felt pretty deflated when he handed in his final draft: "I'd be ~~Henry Ford~~. President Clinton."

You can help children like Collin who struggle with thought paralysis (Levine 1999) learn how to develop ideas for writing by brainstorming, recalling memories and experiences, and using sensory images.



"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

—**Malcolm S. Forbes**

Brainstorming for a Topic

How many times have you heard: "I don't know what to write about"? Try to eliminate those dreaded words from your students' vocabulary by helping them discover that they do, in fact, have much to write about, and that you are going to respect their thoughts by starting your first writing session by brainstorming topic ideas. So that students don't feel overwhelmed, however, limit the amount of time for this exercise, but make sure that by the end of this period each student has chosen a topic.

Students with language-based difficulties may have trouble deciding on a topic and then using vocabulary specific to that topic. Children with poor memory may have trouble even *remembering* their topic. That is why brainstorming is a particularly helpful strategy, especially if used in a group situation. It aids topic development, and, carried further, can help students with the organization and planning stages of writing. Together, teachers and classmates can help students explore thoughts in greater depth in order to develop these ideas into a suitable topic.

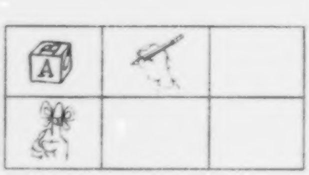
Here's how to make the brainstorming process productive and stress-free:

1. Begin by asking students to write down anything about which they would like to write—subjects they know and care about. They need to know they won't *have* to write about everything they list. The idea is to get as many ideas down on paper as is possible in four minutes. (You can say *six, seven, nine* minutes—just don't use *five*, because they know we never mean it when we say, "In just another five minutes . . . ") This part of the brainstorming session should not exceed 10 minutes. Students need to know that their time is limited, so look at the clock and time them. Although student work should be legible, neat handwriting and accurate spelling are not a priority at this time (they will be, however, during the revising and editing stages). You'll see a much better flow of ideas if the student is concentrating on her ideas and not worrying about the conventions and rules of our language.

For the student with weak motor skills, you will need to modify this activity either by providing a tape recorder so that she can talk into it quietly while the others write or by taking notes as the student lists her ideas. Children will feel at ease with this exercise if you just say, "Come on! We don't have much time. I'll be your secretary!" Again, you need to be clear in your own mind that the purpose of the activity is to record as many ideas as possible. That's it! Get it done in whatever way the student is most comfortable.

> *"One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child."*
>
> —Carl Jung

2. When time is up, call students together for a sharing session. Using general headings such as *Places, People, Sports, Pets, Friends, Travel, Family*, etc. Ask individuals to tell the group some of the things on their list until everyone who *wants to* has had a chance to contribute. Assure students that it's fine to add to their list if new ideas enter their minds during this group sharing time. This should not be considered copying; it's just a way for students to remind themselves of what they might like to write about.



It is also a good idea to make a list of those topics students brainstormed. Type up this list and distribute a copy to each member of the class. This will be especially helpful to the students for whom the physical act of writing is not fully automatic at this point. It will also give support to those who have weak language skills or trouble remembering multiple ideas due to a memory deficit.

3. After this brief sharing session, ask students to pick three topics they would like to explore further. They should pick things that they have enough information about so they can start writing immediately. The purpose of this exercise is to get the thought process flowing. You don't want a student to choose *volcanoes* as her subject unless she has visited a volcano or has enough information in her head to get started. Research, at this stage, will just slow her down.

4. The next step is to choose which of the three topics students would like to start with. Sometimes it helps to talk with a friend about it, but students usually know what they would like to do at this point.

5. Now, on a clean sheet of paper, direct your students to write as much as they can in seven minutes. (Again, don't automatically choose five minutes. Just try to keep the time to less than 10 minutes.) The students should not worry about complete sentences, which can be in or out of sequence, or spelling. At this point start writing!

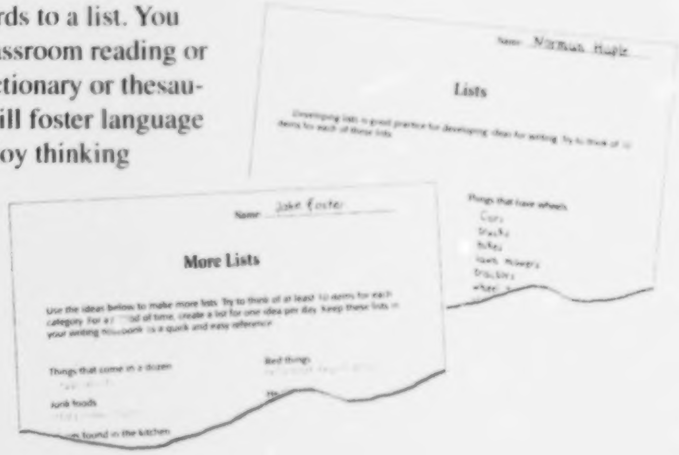
Brainstorming is meant to get the cobwebs out of your students' minds. This entire process has probably taken 30 to 40 minutes. Depending on your schedule, you can either let students write for a while longer or stop. The next time they get back to their writing they will need to read their brainstorming lists and either continue to list ideas or begin to organize what they've written. Everyone will be moving at a different pace.

Brainstorming

Listing

Developing lists will help students who have difficulty with word retrieval and vocabulary acquisition. For children who seem averse to writing, this task should be nonthreatening. Lists, prepared in advance of writing, will help students bypass those expressive language difficulties as they begin to compose, and it's excellent practice for developing ideas and imagination.

Model strategies for how to add words to a list. You might take some words from current classroom reading or compositions of classmates, or use a dictionary or thesaurus. Certain games, such as Outburst, will foster language development and help your students enjoy thinking creatively within categories. Students should keep these lists as handy references when writing. (See pages 41 and 42 for reproducibles.)



Lists

Things that have wheels

More Lists

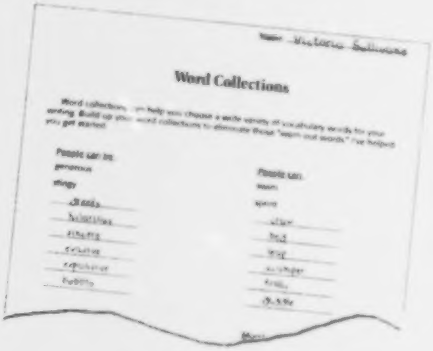
Things that come in a dozen

Red things

Junk foods

Word Collections

Similar to listing, compiling a collection of words created over a time in a selected category can lead to topic ideas. In addition, word collections supply vocabulary to call upon when writing. This will help your students who rely on "um . . ." and "that thing" to bypass their word retrieval weakness. Turn this activity into a class game, perhaps building these lists up on a word wall. (See page 43 for reproducible.)



Word Collections

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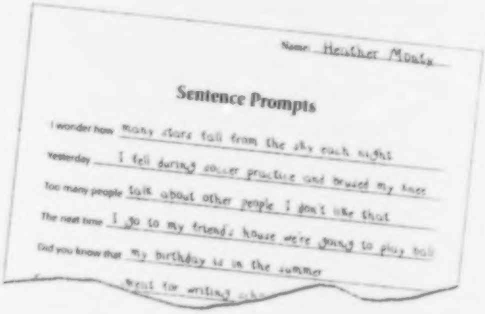
Instructional
Activities

Sentence Prompts

Expressing ideas in writing begins with a sentence. But for many students, a blank sheet of paper is very intimidating. Provide these students with a variety of sentence prompts written on a page. Not only should this lead them to discover a topic of interest, it has the secondary benefit of encouraging the development of quality sentences with varied structures. (See pages 44 for reproducible.)



Name Heather Moutz

Sentence Prompts

I wonder how many stars fall from the sky each night

Yesterday I fell during soccer practice and brused my knee

Too many people talk about other people. I don't like that

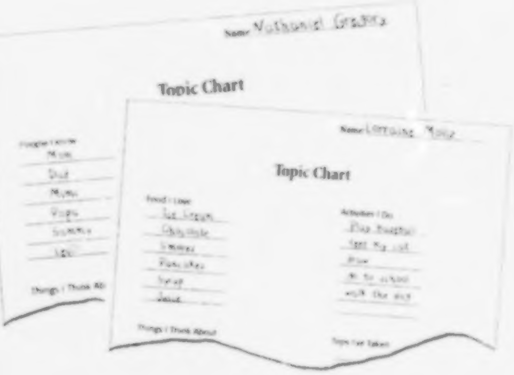
The next time I go to my friend's house we're going to play ball

Did you know that my birthday is in the summer

Best for writing [illegible]

Topic Charts

These charts may be completed during small-group or whole-class brainstorming sessions. They should be individualized by student choice and include general topic ideas. Students can keep charts in their writing folders for quick and easy access. (See pages 45, 46, and 47 for reproducibles.)



Name Nathaniel Graders

Topic Chart

People I Know

Mom

Dad

[illegible]

Things I Think About

Name [illegible]

Topic Chart

Food I Love

Ice Cream

Chocolate

[illegible]

Pancakes

Syrup

Juice

Activities I Do

Play baseball

feed my cat

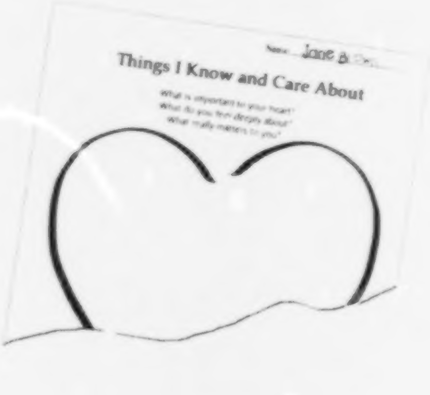
[illegible]

go to school

walk the dog

Things I Think About

Topics I've Taken



Name Jane B[illegible]

Things I Know and Care About

What is important to your heart?
What do you feel deeply about?
What really matters to you?

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Name: ______________________

Lists

Developing lists is good practice for developing ideas for writing. Try to think of eight items for each of these lists.

Things that fall from the sky

Things that have wheels

Musical instruments

Soft things

Name: ____________________

More Lists

Use the ideas below to make more lists. Try to think of at least 10 items for each category. For a period of time create a list for one idea per day. Keep these lists in your writing notebook as quick and easy reference.

- Things that come in a dozen
- Junk foods
- Things found in the kitchen
- Reasons for being late
- Kinds of races
- Antonyms
- Scary things
- Insects
- Things that use batteries
- Men's names
- Things found in a backpack
- Red things
- Health foods
- Team sports
- Kinds of weather
- Ball games
- Homonyms
- Types of houses
- Good names for pets
- Names of mountains
- Women's names
- Kinds of cars

Name: ______________________________

Word Collections

Word collections can help you choose a wide variety of vocabulary words for your writing. Build up your word collections to eliminate those "worn-out words." I've helped you get started.

People can be:

generous

stingy

____

____

____

____

____

____

People can:

swim

sprint

____

____

____

____

____

____

Action words:

skipping

tumbling

____

____

____

____

____

____

Mood words:

joyful

troubled

____

____

____

____

____

____

Name: ____________________

Sentence Prompts

I wonder how ____________________

Yesterday ____________________

Too many people ____________________

The next time ____________________

Did you know that ____________________

Computers are ____________________

We heard a sound ____________________

My first ride ____________________

Most of my friends prefer ____________________

It's easy to figure out that ____________________

Good writers choose ____________________

I just learned ____________________

Name: ____________________

Topic Chart

People I Know

____
____
____
____
____
____

People I Like

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____
____
____
____
____

Things I Love

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____
____
____
____
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Things I Hate

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____
____
____
____

Places I Like

____
____
____
____
____
____

Things I've Done

____
____
____
____
____
____

Name: ____________________

Topic Chart

Food I Love

Things I Think About

Sports I Play

Activities I Do

Trips I've Taken

My Family

Name: ______________________

Things I Know and Care About

What is *important* to your heart?

What do you *feel deeply* about?

What *really* matters to you?

Instructional Strategy

Generating Ideas Using Memories and Experiences

Memories are a treasure chest of ideas for writing.

Journal Writing

Journal writing provides many opportunities for students to develop as writers. Students can learn to question, reflect, and make connections between previous life experiences, factual information, and memories for use in their writing. Connections can arise between the thoughts of the student and those of a friend, parent, or teacher. Journal writing allows students to compare ideas and feelings about a chosen topic or a passage in a book.

Journal writing is also an excellent way to have your students write on a regular basis about topics specific to their lives. Through this exercise students relive experiences, reflect on their feelings, and learn what is important to them. They learn that their *lives* are important. "When well taught, journal writing is a springboard to writing in all other genres" (Routman 2000).

When working with journals, it's important to:

- Give students a choice of topic. Encourage writing on topics of interest and about the subjects that matter to them.
- Journal writing should happen on a regular basis, perhaps daily, and with clear teacher direction.
- As a teacher, take time to model thinking and writing about things that matter to you.
- Remember that all students have stories in their lives and may need your encouragement to "find" them!

Explain to your students that many authors keep journals or notebooks in which they record their ideas, observations, and feelings. Authors keep journals for themselves about things that are important to them. They don't need to worry about spelling or punctuation, they just write down important ideas, then, go back and reread their entries to find new topics to write about.

Consider Peggy Parish, author of the Amelia Bedelia books, *Clues in the Woods, Keys to the Treasure*, and many other children's stories—she thinks of stories while working in her garden. Later, she writes down her ideas. "It's as if the seeds of her ideas get planted in the garden and they blossom a little while later when she writes them down on paper in the house" (Norby and Ryan 1988).

Jack Prelutsky wrote that he saves all of his ideas in notebooks. "I have at least 50—and when I'm ready to write another book of poems I start working my way through all the notebooks" (Lloyd 1989).

There are actually many different types of notebooks or journals, each with a slightly different focus. The following list provides some possible categories, which will give you and your class a place to begin, but don't hesitate to start journals on *any* subject matter. Titles might include:

- Idea Journal
- Math Journal
- Personal Journal
- Reading Response Log
- Science Journal
- Character Journal
- Writer's Observation Journal

You and your students will most likely be able to add to the list as you become more comfortable with journals. Refer to pages 160–166 for specific information about these different types of journals.

STUDENT GEM

"My friend Sam and I have been best friends since Kindergartern (sic) and we both love to write...If Sam had not liked writing I'm sure I would not get very far, because a lot of ideas for stories were thought up by him."

—Kyle, Grade 6

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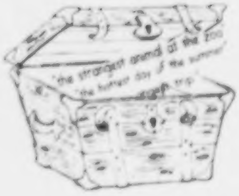
Generating Ideas Using Memories and Experiences

Memory Writing


"the strangest animal at the zoo"
"the hottest day of the summer"
trip

Help students to understand that their *"memories are a treasure chest of ideas for writing."* Supply your students with a word or a phrase such as "the hottest day of the summer." Ask them to recall things that the word or phrase brings to mind. Have students write for five to ten minutes, with the goal of capturing details. This is *not* a finished essay. When the time is up, encourage students to share their written work. Students will find that, while they may have had similar experiences, each is unique to the individual, and every person recalls his or her experience differently.

Dialogue

When brainstorming, have your students talk to friends or classmates. For example, have students discuss something particularly fun that happened on a snow day. Perhaps have them recall an experience they shared with a good friend when doing something related to snow or water. Ask them to reflect on an event similar to one in a story they have read, fostering the reading/writing connection. For example, students might discuss a fort they have made and compare it to the one described in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*. Have them capture these thoughts on paper.

Encourage your students to interview their parents or previous teachers. Adults might think back to their earliest memory of school—walking through the door for the first day of kindergarten. Students can compare their experience with that of their parents.

STUDENT GEM

"The Sky burst into brilliant colors that almost blinded Amelia."

—Mandy, Age 11

Interviewing Grandparents

In one third-grade class students brainstorm questions they might ask grandparents about experiences they had when they were in the third grade. Students in this class always come up with very interesting questions, such as, "Did you practice handwriting with a quill pen?" Each student then drafts a letter to his or her grandparents. These letters are mailed off. Students are usually overwhelmed by responses from grandparents. They often receive letters several pages in length. What a positive way to reinforce the concept of writing while also connecting with family!

Free-Writing

Have the students write for five to ten minutes about anything that comes to mind. If they can't think of anything, as a last resort, have them write "I can't think of anything to write about" over and over again until they begin to generate other ideas. Just keep those pencils moving! Analysis of this "stream-of-consciousness" writing will generally provide clues to what is important to your students.

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Simple Ideas

Often, when we give our students time for free-writing, they complain that they have nothing to write about . . . their lives are boring . . . all they do is watch TV . . . So today, after some discussion, I suggested to Leah that she simply write "I don't know what to write about" over and over until she came up with an idea.

I then sat down and wrote a journal piece about this beautiful tree outside my bedroom window. I love that tree. We are moving soon and I will truly miss it. my writing had a lot of feeling and a description of the beauty of the leaves in the early morning autumn sunshine, even though it might not be considered "exciting."

Well, Leah spent a full 10 minutes writing "I don't know what to write about" over and over. "There," she said. "See, I told you I didn't have anything to write about. my life is not exciting! So, I quietly read to Leah, and to Leah only, my journal piece. She looked at me, eyes downcast with her lower lip quivering, and said, "I have a tree, too." She took a piece of paper and began to write . . . greatly disappointed when free-writing was up for that day. Sometimes it's the simplest of ideas that mean the most to us. . . .

Quick-Write Prompts

Ideally, we'd like to let students choose their own topics in order to increase their motivation and interest. Yet sometimes this is just not possible as state and district testing mandates and individual classroom unit assessments often require students to be able to write effectively on a specific topic. Fortunately, quick-write prompts can help the teacher monitor each student's ability to write "on demand." Simply choose a prompt students can relate to easily, most often a sentence starter or a topic question, or provide your students with a prop, photograph, or picture prompt. This is a good strategy for reaching those children who respond best to visual stimuli.

Initially, your students may need help narrowing down the prompt to a more clearly defined subject. For example, if you give the prompt "The best day I ever had," guide your students to reflect back to an *event* that made a particular day so wonderful. Many of us have read long lists of activities children have done rather than the event that made the day *the best*.

"The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives."

—Robert Maynard Hutchins

Quick-Write Prompts to Get Kids Thinking

The best day I ever had began...

The last dream I remember...

This could only happen to me...

When I got that grade on my test...

I know it sounds crazy...

I got so mad when...

When I saw the broken window...

I always frown...

The worst thing that happened this week...

I never knew...

I don't understand why...

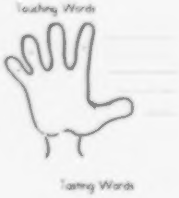
Instructional Strategy

Generating Ideas Using Sensory Images

Sensory exercises can help trigger vivid memories. For example, a reference made to the smell of smoke can trigger memories of a beautiful autumn day and roasting apples on a bonfire. Similarly, listening to an old song can remind students of last year's winter concert; the smell of gunpowder can remind them of Fourth of July fireworks; or the taste of watermelon might make them reflect on the school picnic last June.

Using sensory images in writing helps readers feel as if they are a part of the story. Reflect on this passage from *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt.

> For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light she was used to. It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between tree trunks. There were little flowers she did not recognize, white and palest blue; and endless, tangled vines; and here and there a fallen log, half rotted but soft with patches of sweet green-velvet moss.
>
> And there were creatures everywhere. The air hummed with their daybreak activity: beetles and birds and squirrels and ants, and countless other things unseen, all gentle and self-absorbed and not in the least alarming. There was even, she saw with satisfaction, the toad. It was squatting on a low stump and she might not have noticed it, for it looked more like a mushroom than a living creature there. As she came abreast of it, however, it blinked, and the movement gave it away.
>
> "See?" she exclaimed. "I told you I'd be here first thing in the morning."



Can you feel the peacefulness? Can you hear the soft, subtle humming of the woodland creatures? Help your students develop this sensory awareness and learn to put words to images with this exercise. Encourage them to use their powers of observation to describe sensory images during a 60-second time period. Model this activity first (see page 56). Repeat it several times throughout the year within a variety of settings.

Begin this activity by taking your students out of the classroom—go outside to a quiet spot in the woods, observe recess, sit in the cafeteria during lunch, or visit other classrooms. Tell your class they will need to use their full sensory powers for one full minute. They should think only of what they can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Remind them that it can be *very hard* to single out these sensations and give them our full concentration. We hardly ever notice the feel of a gentle breeze on our faces. It will take practice to be a good sensory observer. Give your students several minutes to record their responses.

Follow up with a group discussion on how each student might describe their sensations differently. Did each student notice different things? Are some more sensitive to sight . . . to sound? You may wish to carry these observations a little further. Have students write a short paragraph describing their "minute," or have students include their sensory images of that minute within the context of a larger composition.

This might lead you, as the teacher, into choosing examples from current classroom literature that includes sensory images, such as the preceding example from *Tuck Everlasting*. Discuss with students how authors use sensory details in their writing and how students can use their observations in describing a "minute." Incorporating these sensory images into our written expression helps our readers feel like they are right there with us!

STUDENT GEM

"When I'm
jumping
[on the
trampoline]
I feel like
I'm in the
clouds."

—Greg, Grade 3

Name: ____________________

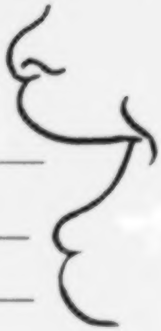
In Just One Minute!

Take 60 seconds to look around and notice everything about your world right now. Write words to describe what you see, what you smell, hear, touch, and taste.

Seeing Words

Hearing Words

Tasting Words



Situation

____

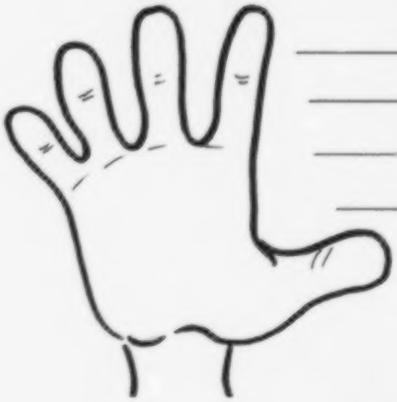
Time

____

Place

____

Touching Words



Smelling Words

Generating Ideas Using Sensory Images

Guess Who???

Children in your class can be your best resource for teaching about accurate description, and Guess Who??? is a fun activity to help develop just this skill.

Here's how it works:

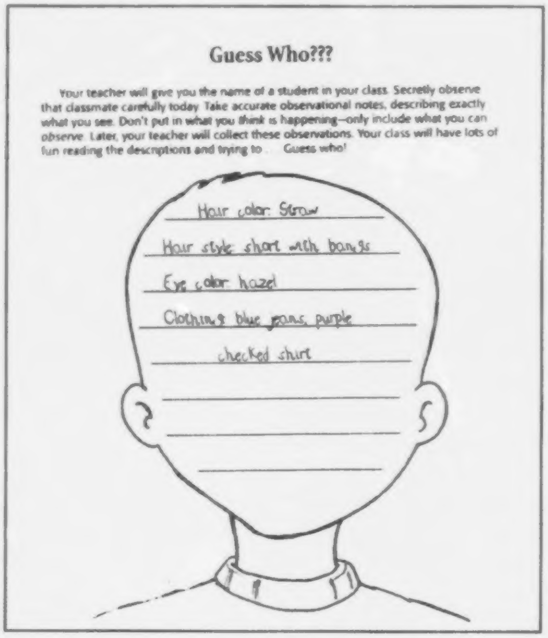
1. Write each student's name on a small slip of paper and have students draw a name "from a hat." Make sure no one draws his own name.

2. Pass out the Guess Who??? reproducible (see page 58).

3. Explain to students that they are to secretly observe their classmate and take accurate notes describing that individual. They might include hair color or style, eyes, height, clothing, mannerisms, etc. Stress that students are recording *specific observations*, not feelings or opinions.

4. At the end of the day, collect the observational notes. Read descriptions aloud (editing, if necessary, any negative comments or opinions) and see if your students can guess who!

This activity could be adapted to include objects common to our everyday lives. For example, a pencil might be described as "a long, thin cylindrical object hollowed in the center and filled with graphite. It is an instrument used for writing on paper." Your students could become quite sophisticated in their descriptions while trying to "stump" their classmates.



Guess Who???

Your teacher will give you the name of a student in your class. Secretly observe that classmate carefully today. Take accurate observational notes, describing exactly what you see. Don't put in what you *think* is happening—only include what you can observe. Later, your teacher will collect these observations. Your class will have lots of fun reading the descriptions and trying to . . . Guess who!

Hair color: Straw
Hair style: short with bangs
Eye color: hazel
Clothing: blue jeans, purple
checked shirt

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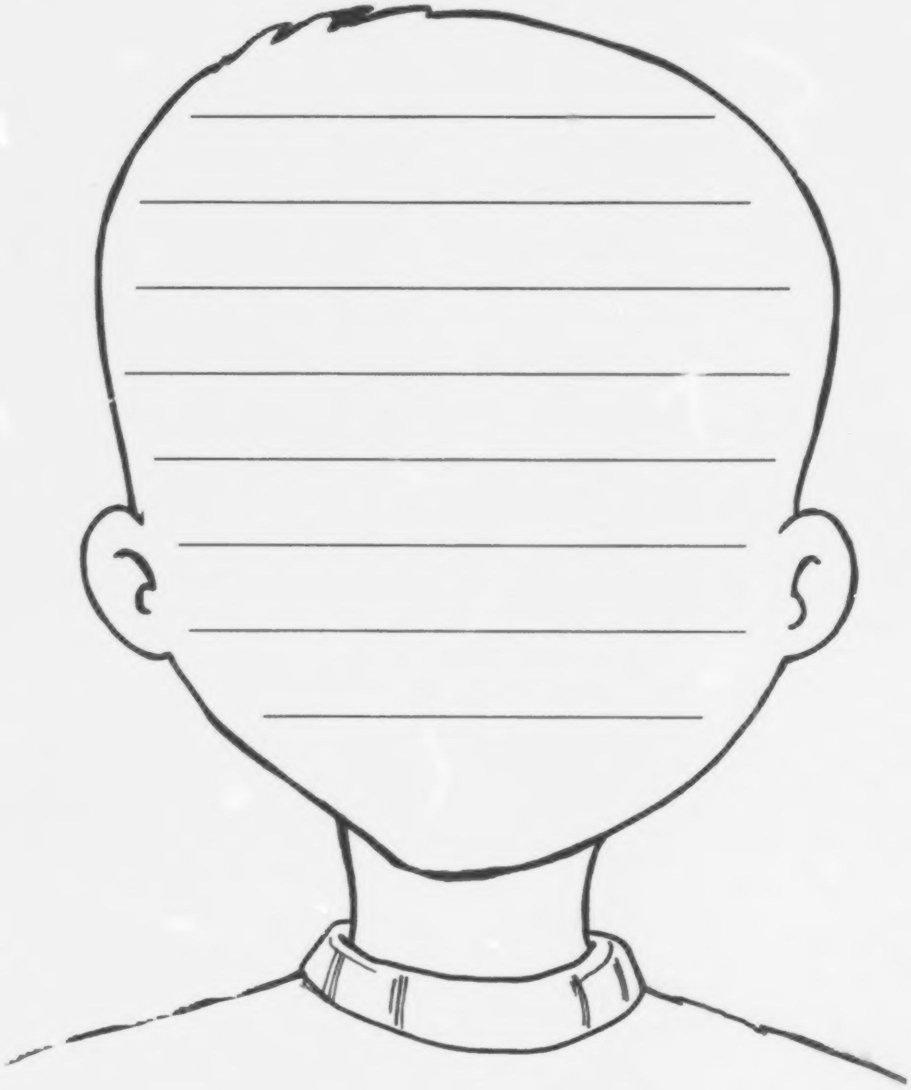
Name: ______________________________

Guess Who???

Your teacher will give you the name of a student in your class. Secretly observe that classmate carefully today. Take accurate observational notes, describing exactly what you see. Don't put in what you *think* is happening—only include what you can *observe*. Later, your teacher will collect these observations. Your class will have lots of fun reading the descriptions and trying to . . . Guess Who!



Scientific Description

Scientists are very careful to record what they see in their observation of animals. They describe precisely and factually how the animals live—physical appearance, diet, and behaviors. This scientific description must be clear and without personal opinion.

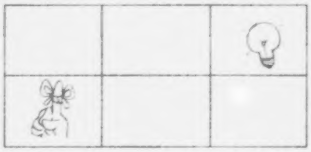
A scientist would say:

> "...orangutans do not live in groups. Males travel alone, and mothers are usually accompanied only by an infant and sometimes by an older juvenile." (*National Geographic*, August 1998, page 38)

A scientist would not say:

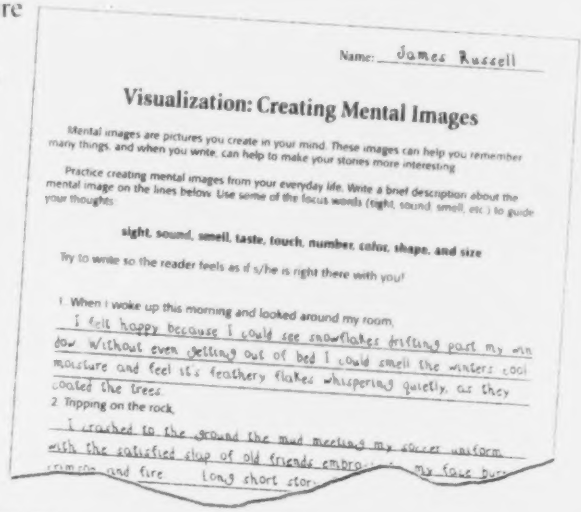
> "Monkeys look so cute traveling in the forest."

Have your students observe any animal. Ask them to note what the animal looks like, what it eats, how it acts, and some of its habits. Then have them write their observations. Encourage students to be scientific and write about only what they observe. (See page 61 for reproducible.)



Visualization

Visualization is a strategy where students create mental images in their "mind's eye." Some teachers may wish to provide a visual reference for a student's "internal screen." These images can help improve memory. Including mental images within compositions can help with ideation and make stories more interesting. Practice creating mental images from everyday life. (See page 62 for reproducible.)



Name: James Russell

Visualization: Creating Mental Images

Mental images are pictures you create in your mind. These images can help you remember many things, and when you write, can help to make your stories more interesting.

Practice creating mental images from your everyday life. Write a brief description about the mental image on the lines below. Use some of the focus words (sight, sound, smell, etc.) to guide your thoughts.

sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, number, color, shape, and size

Try to write so the reader feels as if s/he is right there with you!

1. When I woke up this morning and looked around my room,
I felt happy because I could see snowflakes drifting past my window Without even getting out of bed I could smell the winters cool moisture and feel it's feathery flakes whispering quietly, as they coated the trees.
2. Tripping on the rock,
I crashed to the ground the mud meeting my soccer uniform with the satisfied slap of old friends embro my face bur crimson and fire Long short stor

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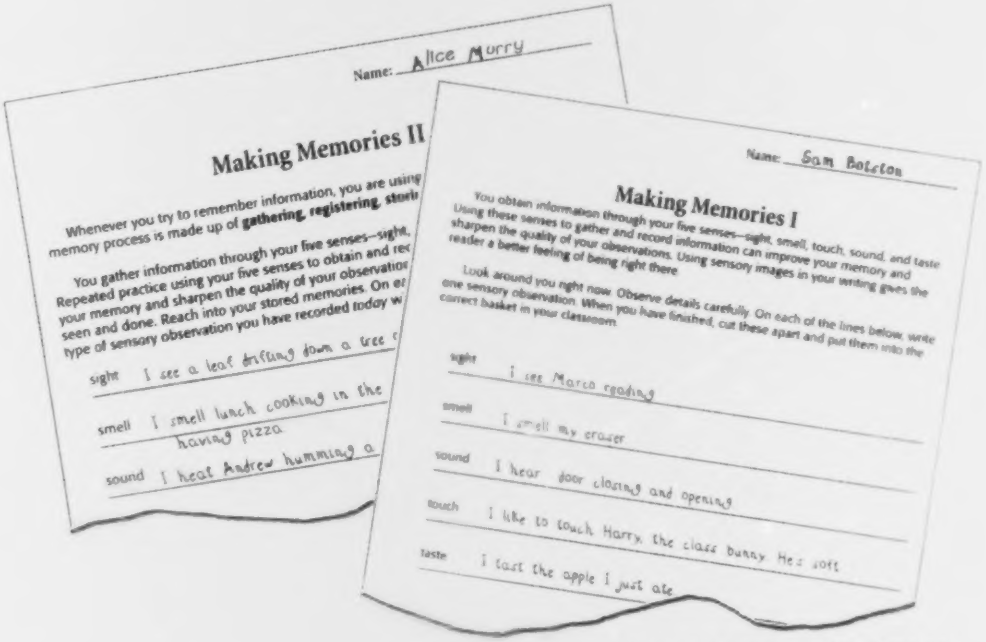
Observation

In Making Memories I (see page 63 for reproducible for grades three and four) and Making Memories II (see page 64 for reproducible for grades five and six), students are also encouraged to use their senses to gather information, thereby increasing their powers of observation.

You may find it helpful to provide students with a few examples, such as:

- I hear the clock ticking softly.
- The wind blows gently across my cheeks.
- The sun is bright, yet it leaves dark shadows on the floor.

For younger students, teachers should have students cut apart their sensory observations and place them into baskets, labeled for each sense, within the classroom. Explore several of the observations gathered in each basket, discussing how sensory observations can be similar or quite different. Have students gather a slip from one or two of the baskets and try to use these sensory observations in a journal composition. Expect that students will need repeated practice to incorporate these observations into their daily writing.



Name: Alice Murry

Making Memories II

Whenever you try to remember information, you are using
memory process is made up of **gathering, registering, stori**

You gather information through your five senses—sight,
Repeated practice using your five senses to obtain and rec
your memory and sharpen the quality of your observatio
seen and done. Reach into your stored memories. On ea
type of sensory observation you have recorded today w

sight I see a leaf drifting down a tree

smell I smell lunch cooking in the
having pizza

sound I heal Andrew humming a

Name: Sam Bolcton

Making Memories I

You obtain information through your five senses—sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste. Using these senses to gather and record information can improve your memory and sharpen the quality of your observations. Using sensory images in your writing gives the reader a better feeling of being right there.

Look around you right now. Observe details carefully. On each of the lines below, write one sensory observation. When you have finished, cut these apart and put them into the correct basket in your classroom.

sight I see Marco reading

smell I smell my craser

sound I hear door closing and opening

touch I like to touch Harry, the class bunny. He: soft

taste I tast the apple I just ate

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Name: ____________________

Scientific Observation

Scientists are careful in their observations of the animals and other organisms they study. They try to describe all they can, for example, about animals and how animals live. When writing their observations, they describe an animal's appearance, habitats, foods, behaviors, and habits. The scientific description must be clear.

Example of bad scientific description: "Bullfrogs like to jump and play leapfrog."

Example of good scientific description: "A frog is an amphibian that spends part of its life in the water and part on land. It lives in water or wet places. The skin of the frog is smooth and moist. A frog has long legs. It is able to jump long distances."

Choose any animal that will let you remain close enough to observe it for a while. This might be a pet, a bird in a tree, a toad hopping along in the woods, or any other animals that you can carefully watch over a period of time.

Take some notes about your observations of this animal. Try to include information about the appearance of the animal, how it acts, and some of its behaviors. Only write down information about what you *observed*.

Appearance ____________________

____

Habitat ____________________

____

Food ____________________

____

Behavior ____________________

____

Habits ____________________

____

Use these notes to write a short report about your animal.

Name: ____________________________

Visualization: Creating Mental Images

Mental images are pictures you create in your mind. These images can help you remember many things, and when you write, can help to make your stories more interesting.

Practice creating mental images from your everyday life. Write a brief description about the mental image on the lines below. Use some of the focus words below to guide your thoughts:

sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, number, color, shape, and size

Try to write so the reader feels as if s/he is right there with you!

1. When I woke up this morning and looked around my room,

____

____

____

2. Tripping on the rock,

____

____

____

3. Standing in the hot sun,

____

____

____

4. Thanksgiving at our house is always

____

____

____

Name: ______________________

Making Memories I

You obtain information through your five senses–sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. Using these senses to gather and record information can improve your memory and sharpen the quality of your observations. Using sensory images in your writing gives the reader a better feeling of being right there.

Look around you right now. Observe details carefully. On each of the lines below, write one sensory observation. When you have finished, cut these apart and put them into the correct basket in your classroom.

sight ______________________

smell ______________________

hearing ______________________

touch ______________________

taste ______________________

Name: ______________________

Making Memories II

Whenever you try to remember information, you are using the memory process. The memory process is made up of **gathering**, **registering**, **storing**, and **recalling** information.

You gather information through your five senses—sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. Repeated practice using your five senses to obtain and record information can improve your memory and sharpen the quality of your observations. Think about things you have seen and done. Reach into your stored memories. On each line below, write at least one type of sensory observation you have recorded *today* with your senses.

sight ______________________

smell ______________________

hearing ______________________

touch ______________________

taste ______________________

Focus your attention fully on one of the above sensory observations. Keep your attention focused on that and recall the smallest details of that experience. Now create a detailed mental picture. Reflect. Think about these questions:

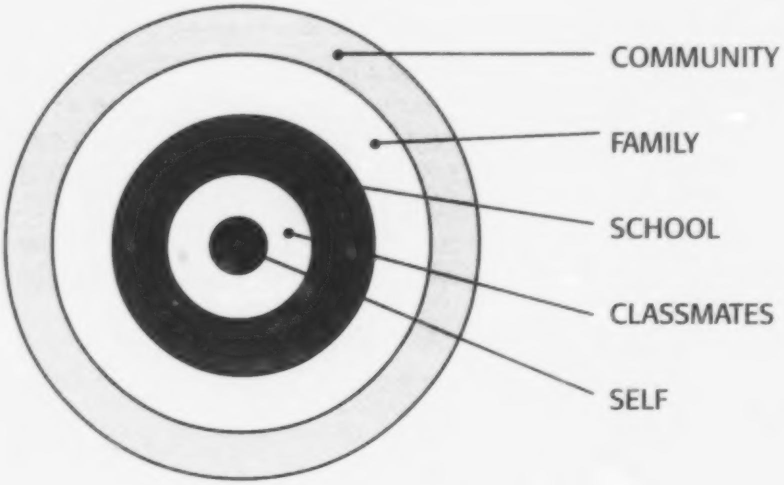
Was it a pleasant observation?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was with you?
- Did it remind you of another experience you've had?
- Can you add more details to your mental picture?
- Did all your senses interact during this observation?

Now that you've created a detailed mental picture, write about that one sensory observation in depth. Choose your words with care so your observation is accurate and complete. Help your reader use all her/his senses.

Planning the Writing Project: Researching and Organizing

"Enthusiasm is contagious. Be a carrier."
—**Susan Rabin**

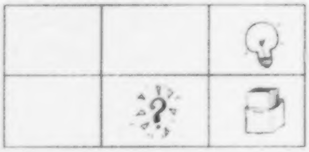
Once your students have selected topics for writing it's time to *plan* the writing project. At this stage of writing, it is critical for students to identify the purpose for writing and "target" their audience. A story written for classmates, for example, will be very different from an article published in the school newspaper or a letter written to a business.



"Writing-with-a-Purpose" category ideas include:

- Personal narratives
- Poetry
- Labels
- Puppet shows
- Thank-you notes
- Job applications
- Reminders
- Product instructions
- Advice column
- Shopping lists
- Slogans and mottoes
- Posters
- Radio skits
- "Help Wanted" ads
- Jokes and riddles
- Cartoons
- Letters to the editor
- Research reports
- Speeches
- Pen pal letters
- Game rules
- Recipes

Prewriting



Prewriting, or planning, is the organizational stage of the writing process during which students gather and generate information and ideas. How do you make sure students understand how to use information and ideas? How do students proceed in a "step-wise" manner? Do they know enough about the subject? Have they established a focus? What more should they find out? This is also a time for self-reflection. Students ask themselves questions such as "What do I want the reader to get out of my writing?" Assisting students in predicting the outcome of their pieces will help guide them throughout the writing process.

During the prewriting stage, students need to gather ideas together for use in their composition. If your students are writing about a topic they know and care about, then encourage them to begin by doing some free-writing. This will allow their ideas to flow, and they can *discover* what it is they know and feel. Writing this discovery draft can be a time of clarification for the student. If, however, the student writer's purpose is to provide information on a given topic, he may need to do some research. This can be done in the traditional manner of reading reference materials and taking notes, but don't forget to encourage

- viewing factual videos and television shows
- listening to and/or interviewing individuals about their lives
- searching the Internet
- recalling a past life experience, e.g., a trip to a museum
- creating a new experience, e.g., visiting a factory

Next is the step in the writing process where students begin to organize the ideas they now have down on paper. This would be a good time to introduce visual organizers, such as webs, note cards, or outlines. Some children don't need that structure with every piece of writing, but it won't hurt anyone to learn how to use a graphic organizer *in case* they do need it sometime. If your students already know how to use visual tools, then suggest they use them. For students with *attention deficit* or with *weak organizational skills*, these organizers could be very effective and should make the job much easier for them. (See pages 76–78 for more information on graphic organizers.)

At this stage of the writing process, present your students with the POWER to write (see page 67). This highly flexible organizational writing strategy was adapted from "Watering up the Curriculum for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities: Goals of the Knowledge Dimension" by Edwin S. Ellis, 1997, (*Remedial and Special Education*, 18, 326–346. Copyright 1997 by PRO-ED, Inc. Adapted with permission.)

POWER for Writing

Plan

- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who is my audience?
- What do I hope will happen when they [read my writing]?
- Do I have a good, focused topic?
- Do I know enough about my topic to begin writing?
- What do I know? What do I need to know?

Organization

- Are my main ideas in a logical order?
- Which ideas should I write about 1st, 2nd, etc.?
- Do I have supporting details for each main idea?
- Do I need any more information?

Write

- Have I thought my lead out carefully?
- Did I introduce the topic and main ideas in the first paragraph?
- Did I write about each main idea and support [it] with my details?
- Have I included specific facts and information about my subject?
- Have I included strong sentences, visual images, sensory detail, and interesting words?
- Am I pleased by what I have written?
- Do I need to write a little more?

Edit

- Does my overall paper makes sense?
- Did I follow my organizational plan?
- Does each sentence make sense? Is it complete?
- Is my grammar correct?
- Have I put capital letters, commas, periods, and apostrophes where I need them?
- Have I held a conference with a peer for feedback?

Rewrite

- Does this composition express my ideas?
- Am I ready to copy my paper over neatly?
- Did I copy it correctly?
- Have I checked once again for errors?
- Is this my best work?

Adapted from J.B. Schumaker (under development), *Theme Writing Strategy*, Lawrence, Kansas, and J.B. Schumaker, Susan Noland, and Donald Deschler (1985), *Error Monitoring Strategy*, Lawrence, Kansas.

Scaffolding

Students who struggle with writing will need more intensive support. Scaffolding is a support structure that helps break down projects into easy-to-accomplish, incremental steps. Something as simple as using Post-it notes to organize story parts is an example of scaffolding, or, as you will read, students and teachers using interactive writing is an example of a scaffolding strategy.

Teachers and students can work together to develop the best scaffolding approach for students who experience problems in the following areas:

- **Problem-Solving:** This approach is especially relevant for students who have difficulty with problem-solving. These students will have trouble breaking the writing piece into stages and prioritizing first, second, third, etc.

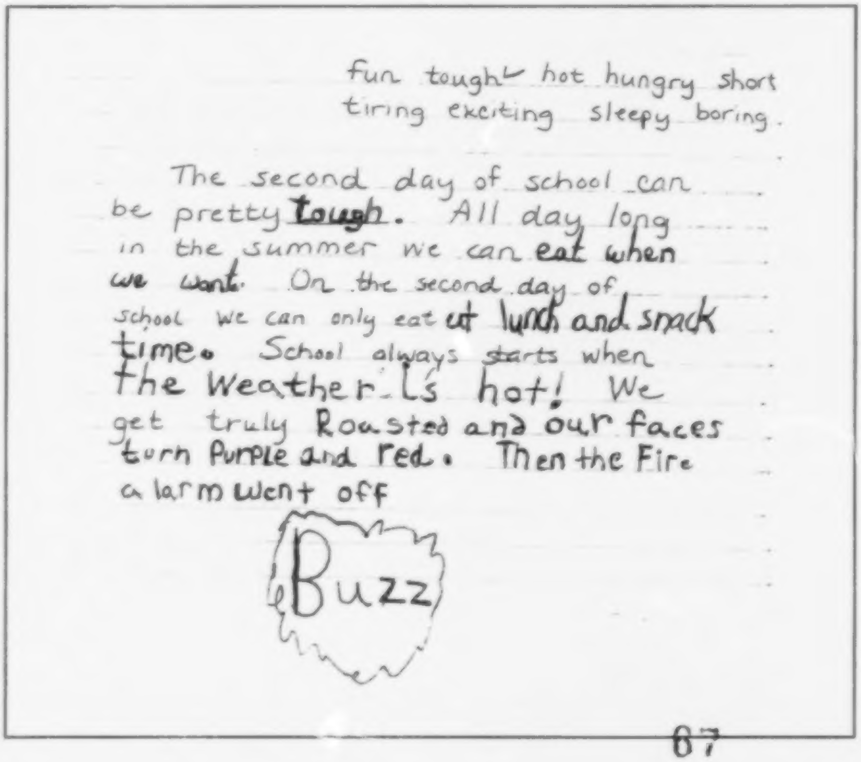
- **Memory:** Activating prior knowledge can be difficult for many students.

- **Language:** Weak language skills can interfere with a student's ideation and ability to elaborate. Word choice can be impacted by poor word retrieval skills.

- **Motor Skills:** The physical act of writing for students with deficient motor skills can impact their ability to get ideas down on paper.

Scaffolding and Interactive Writing

For any one or combination of the difficulties already mentioned, a teacher may find it necessary to engage an individual student or small group of students in the process of interactive writing. This level of support is a way of scaffolding the efforts of the student, who works next to and closely with the teacher. They discuss things such as word choice, spelling, description, and punctuation. They share the task of writing and sometimes even share the pen. The student writes what she can, and the teacher fills in when the child is at a point of difficulty or inexperience. The teacher guides the child, who is in the role of apprentice. The student is learning the craft of writing at the knee of an experienced writer. It is important to note that, although students should eventually take "ownership" of a project and experiment with inventive spelling and other conventions, at this stage she should learn as much from the teacher as possible. Since the teacher is modeling the task, the student should spell words accurately and have the opportunity to walk through some problem-solving situations at the teacher's side. These are valuable experiences for any student, but especially for one who lacks confidence in his/her ability to write.



fun tough✓ hot hungry short
tiring exciting sleepy boring.

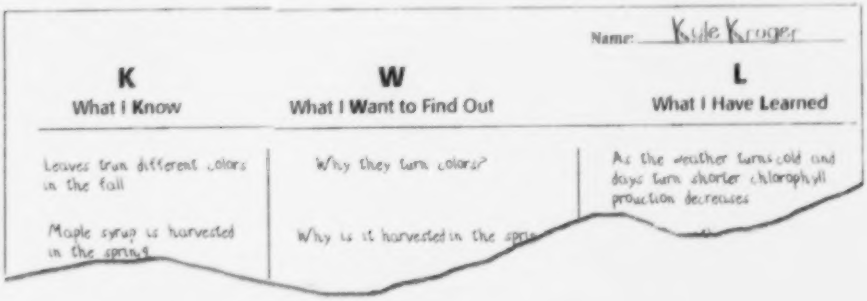
The second day of school can
be pretty **tough**. All day long
in the summer we can eat when
we want. On the second day of
school we can only eat at lunch and snack
time. School always starts when
the Weather is hot! We
get truly Rousted and our faces
turn Purple and red. Then the Fire
alarm went off

Instructional Strategy

Research and Organization

K-W-L

This is a strategy to help students organize their learning as they research for information to include in their writing. The acronym **K-W-L** stands for:



Name: Kyle Kroger

K What I Know	W What I Want to Find Out	L What I Have Learned
Leaves trun different colors in the fall	Why they turn colors?	As the weather turns cold and days turn shorter chlorophyll prouction decreases
Maple syrup is harvested in the spring	Why is it harvested in the spr	

During grades three through six your students will begin to learn in-depth about researching and using facts to write informational reports. At this age, you will find that students are intensely interested in the world around them and are often very aware of their own fund of knowledge. The K-W-L strategy gives students a way to document what they already know, to begin to explore their interests, and to measure for themselves their own learning. In a very real way, this format puts learning into the students' hands and gives them a way to be accountable to themselves. It is flexible and can be used across the curriculum.

Initially, students will need some guidance to use this format. Use of a large classroom format, such as chart paper or a bulletin board, is recommended as a model. Older students should have their own copies available (see page 71 for a reproducible chart). Begin by discussing the topic and facts students already know about the topic. As you or the students write these facts in the first column, "What I Know," begin to draw out ideas for information they would like to know, and have students record this in the middle section, "What I Want to Find Out." As you proceed through this process, explain your thinking that lies behind this process and model what researchers do when they work. Give students time to research, read, and discuss their findings. Record these on the chart in the third column, "What I Have Learned." As students progress through their research, check to make sure they are recording what they have learned.

Name: ______________________

K What I **K**now	**W** What I **W**ant to Find Out	**L** What I Have **L**earned

Research and Organization

"What If" Games

Games that build questioning skills can help students think in-depth about topics and develop leads. The ability to develop good questions will assist students in the writing process by teaching them to develop and answer their own questions as they work. Asking questions is a link to having something to say.

Look in newspapers or magazines for topic ideas. *National Geographic*, women's magazines, and news magazines are all good sources. Cut out short "news-in-brief" blurbs, photos, or interesting phrases, and spread them out for your students to view.

Have students pick one or two of the following prompts and then tell them: *"Let your imagination soar!"*

Ask:

"**What if** I were ______ (name a particular person)?"
"**What if** I traveled to ______?"
"**What if** I met up with ______ (a friend) and we saw a ______ (animal or creature)?"

There's no limit to the questions we can ask ourselves. Brainstorm lots of "What if . . . ?" questions with your class and record them on a piece of chart paper as a reference for everyone. Each answer will lead the writer down a path to new story ideas. (Once this strategy is introduced to your students, they may start using it all day long, in and out of school! You could suggest they keep a notebook with them and jot down interesting ideas for the next "What if…?" activity.

Give your students a list of the sample questions, either on a sheet (see page 73) or on a piece of chart paper you have set up in front of the class, and have them write their responses in list form. This will get the "juices flowing," and they will be sure to want to start writing their stories! Remember to have tape recorders available for those students who can think much faster than they can write. It would be a shame for them to lose any of their ideas while they struggle with handwriting.

Name: ____________________

What If . . . ?

A girl fell asleep on the bus on her way home. When she woke up she was the only child left on the bus and the driver was parking the bus in the big bus company parking lot. He hadn't noticed her.

- **What if** she hid behind the seat and said nothing?

- **What if** the bus driver locked the bus and walked away?

- **What if** the girl got out of the bus and started to walk home?

- **What if** the girl started to cry when the bus driver turned off the bus?

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

The SRSD instructional models are the work of Harris, Schmidt, and Graham, authors of "Every Child Can Write: Strategies for Composition and Self-Regulation in the Writing Process" (1997). Through the use of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) models, students master specific mnemonic strategies they can use and adapt to monitor their own goal-setting, organization, writing efforts, and assessment. These skills are essential for any student, but they are most useful for a student who lacks these self-directed qualities.

The authors recommend introducing each strategy and then providing support as the students learn to use it independently. The six stages that provide the basis of SRSD include:

- Develop Background Knowledge
- Discuss It
- Model It
- Memorize It
- Support It
- Independent Performance

Students who struggle with writing may need multiple instructional writing sessions and support prior to becoming more automatic in adopting each mnemonic strategy. Other students may grasp it in a few short lessons.

The authors found that "SRSD leads to changes and improvements in four main aspects of students' performance: quality in writing, knowledge of writing, approach to writing, and self-efficacy" (Harris, Schmidt, and Graham 1997).

In the following SRSD story grammar strategy, students can begin to organize their writing by first answering several key questions about their story. (See page 75 for sample.)

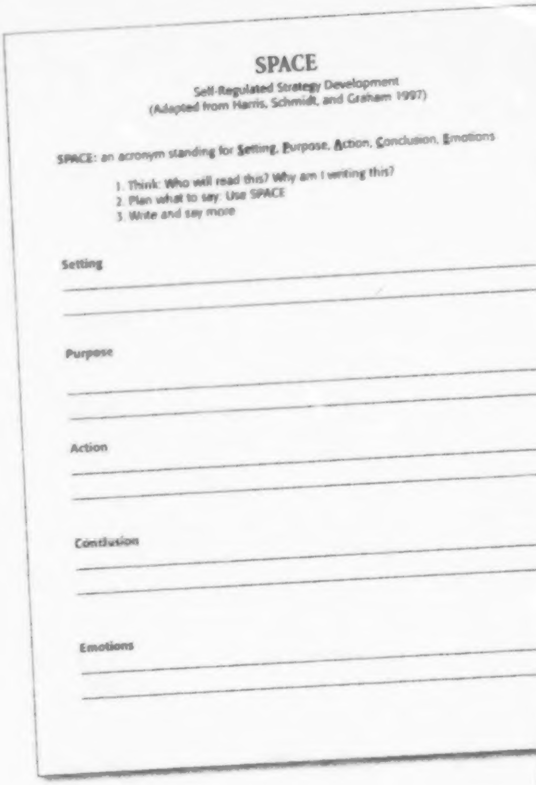
W - W - W   What = 2   How = 2

Who is the main character, and who else is in the story?
When does the story take place?

Where does the story take place?
What does the main character do?
What happens when the main character does it?
How does the story end?
How do the main character and other characters feel?

Another SRSD Planning Strategy (see sample below) suggests:

1. Think: Who will read this? Why am I writing this?
2. Plan what to say: Use **SPACE** (acronym standing for **S**etting, **P**urpose, **A**ction, **C**onclusion, **E**motions).
3. Write and say more.



SPACE

Self-Regulated Strategy Development
(Adapted from Harris, Schmidt, and Graham 1997)

SPACE: an acronym standing for **S**etting, **P**urpose, **A**ction, **C**onclusion, **E**motions

1. Think: Who will read this? Why am I writing this?
2. Plan what to say: Use SPACE
3. Write and say more

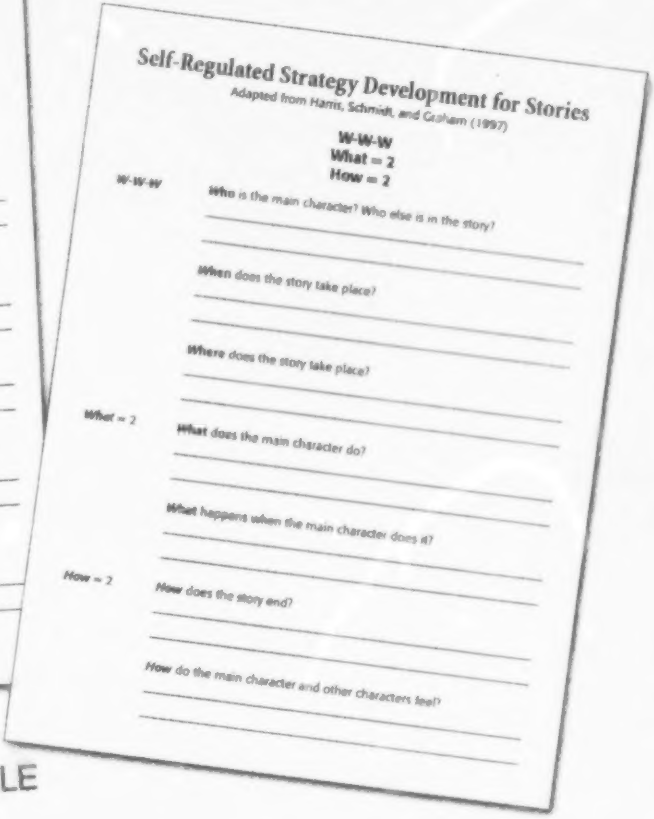
Setting

Purpose

Action

Conclusion

Emotions



Self-Regulated Strategy Development for Stories

Adapted from Harris, Schmidt, and Graham (1997)

W-W-W
What = 2
How = 2

W-W-W

Who is the main character? Who else is in the story?

When does the story take place?

Where does the story take place?

What = 2

What does the main character do?

What happens when the main character does it?

How = 2

How does the story end?

How do the main character and other characters feel?

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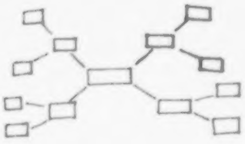
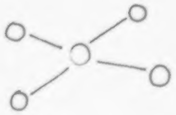
Other Tools Used for Researching and Organizing

There exists a variety of organizational strategies that all children should become familiar with and have an opportunity to use. With experience, students will learn which style of organizer works best for them. Some students may decide that they do not truly need an organizer for all writing tasks, while others may become firmly rooted in their use.

Webs



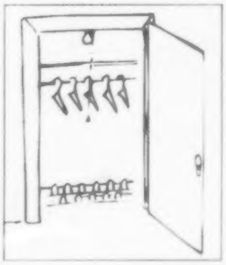


Webs are tools all students should learn how to use because they help them to see how their ideas are connected and can sometimes grow out of one another. Webs can be used to:

- brainstorm ideas within a topic for a research project
- plan out the elements in a mystery
- explore the different areas needed to write a biography
- develop a character

You can probably think of an infinite number of ways to use webs. (See page 79 for web reproducible.)

For some computer assistance, try Inspiration Software, a webbing software program. This is designed to help stimulate writers visually. Webs, created using graphic symbols, are turned into outlines. This is available in a K–3 version (titled Kidspiration) and a 4–12 version through Inspiration Software at 1-800-877-4292 or www.inspiration.com. There is also an adult software version.



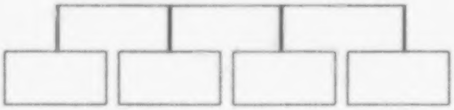
Outlines

One fourth grade teacher provides her students with an analogy of the *closet* as outline. She asks her students to close their eyes and visualize their closets at home. "Imagine the closet has been entirely cleared out." (This draws groans from her students!) She asks everyone to picture the shelves, the rod, the hooks, and the spaces for shoes. When they have that mental image, she suggests an outline is like the closet. Just as the closet is a system for organizing clothing, the outline is a system for organizing ideas. This teacher's approach is very effective!

The outline is a useful organizer for students when they want to sequence their ideas by using topics with subtopics and supporting details or examples. Outlines are especially helpful for sequencing and deciding which details the writer wants to include in a piece of writing. (See page 80 for a very basic guide for outlining.) Of course, you can vary the number of topics, subtopics, and supporting details as needed.

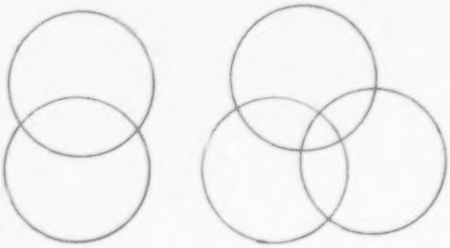
Line Diagrams

Line diagrams are practical tools for developing timelines and collecting information chronologically. Also useful for essays and informational writing, line diagrams can help students organize relevant subtopics and supporting details. (See page 81 for a reproducible to use with your class.)



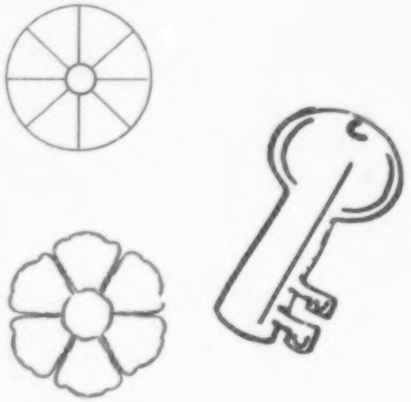
Venn Diagrams

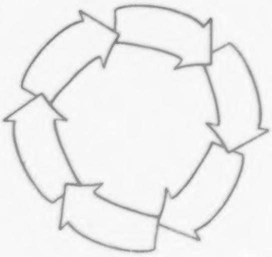
Venn Diagrams are useful when comparing and contrasting information. This type of diagram lends itself to the organization of details comparing two or three subjects. (See pages 82–83 for a reproducible page to use with your class.)



Charts

Some people really work more efficiently if they can picture the form that their information is going to take. Graphic organizers such as Key Ideas, Pie Charts, or Petal Charts help them to do that. They draw out the important facts so the writer can look at them and focus. (See pages 84–86 for reproducible pages to use with your class.)



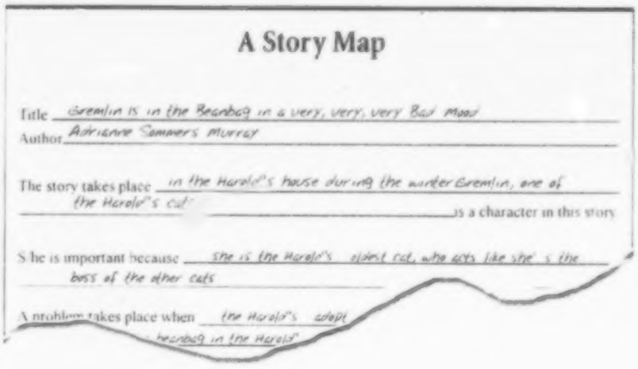


Circular Graphs

These graphs can be used when students want to develop stories that begin and end in the same manner, such as *The Ox-Cart Man* and *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. (See page 87 for a reproducible organizer.)

Story Maps

Story Maps are helpful to some students when they are trying to write a fictional story. It helps them think about the characters and basic plot of their story before they start writing. Writing fiction is very difficult for most students in the intermediate grades. They tend to write an endless stream of imaginative ideas that is difficult for most readers to follow. Thinking ahead and planning their story's basic path can help students avoid this problem. (See page 88 for reproducible.)



A Story Map

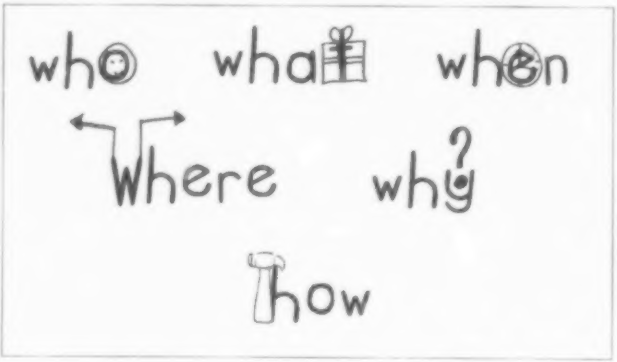
Title Gremlin is in the Beanbag in a very, very, very Bad Mood

Author Adrianne Sommers Murray

The story takes place in the Harold's house during the winter Gremlin, one of the Harold's cat is a character in this story

S/he is important because she is the Harold's oldest cat, who acts like she's the boss of the other cats

A problem takes place when the Harold's adopt beanbag in the Harold'



5 W's
Who? What? When? Where? Why?
Be sure to add How?

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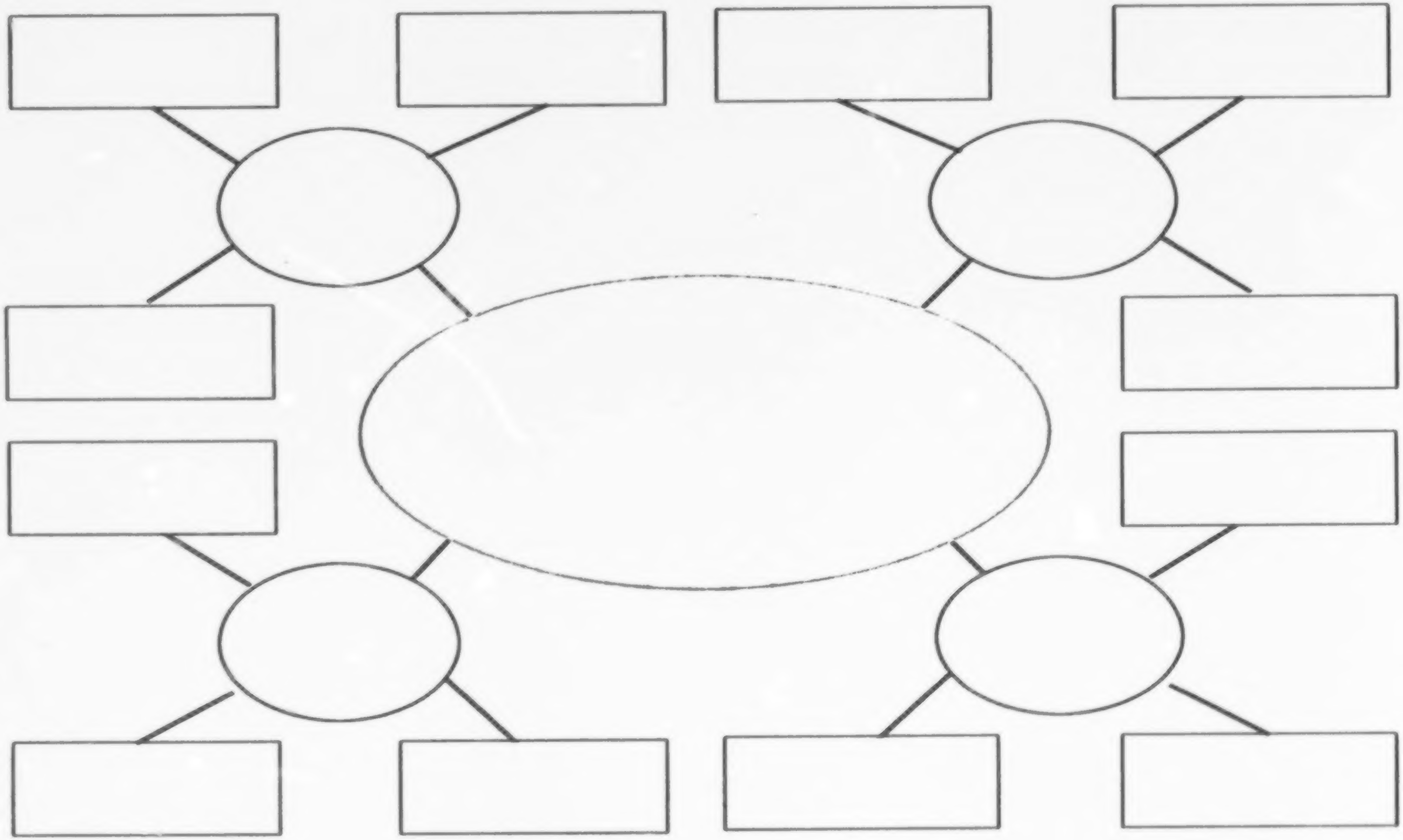
Spinning Your Web

Name: ____________________



○ Topic

○ Area to explore

▭ Details/Facts

Outline Form

Name: ______________________

I.

A. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

B. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

C. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

II.

A. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

B. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

C. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

III.

A. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

B. ______________________

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

C. ______________________

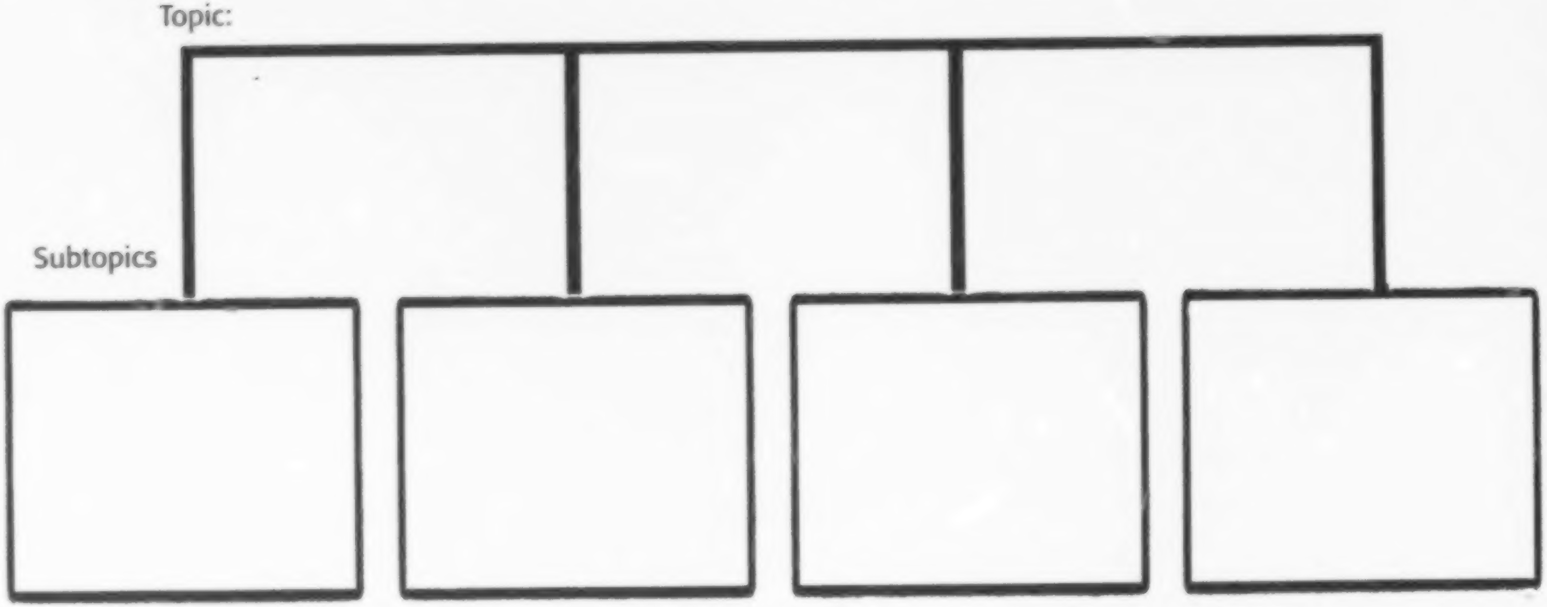
1. ______________________

2. ______________________

Reproducible

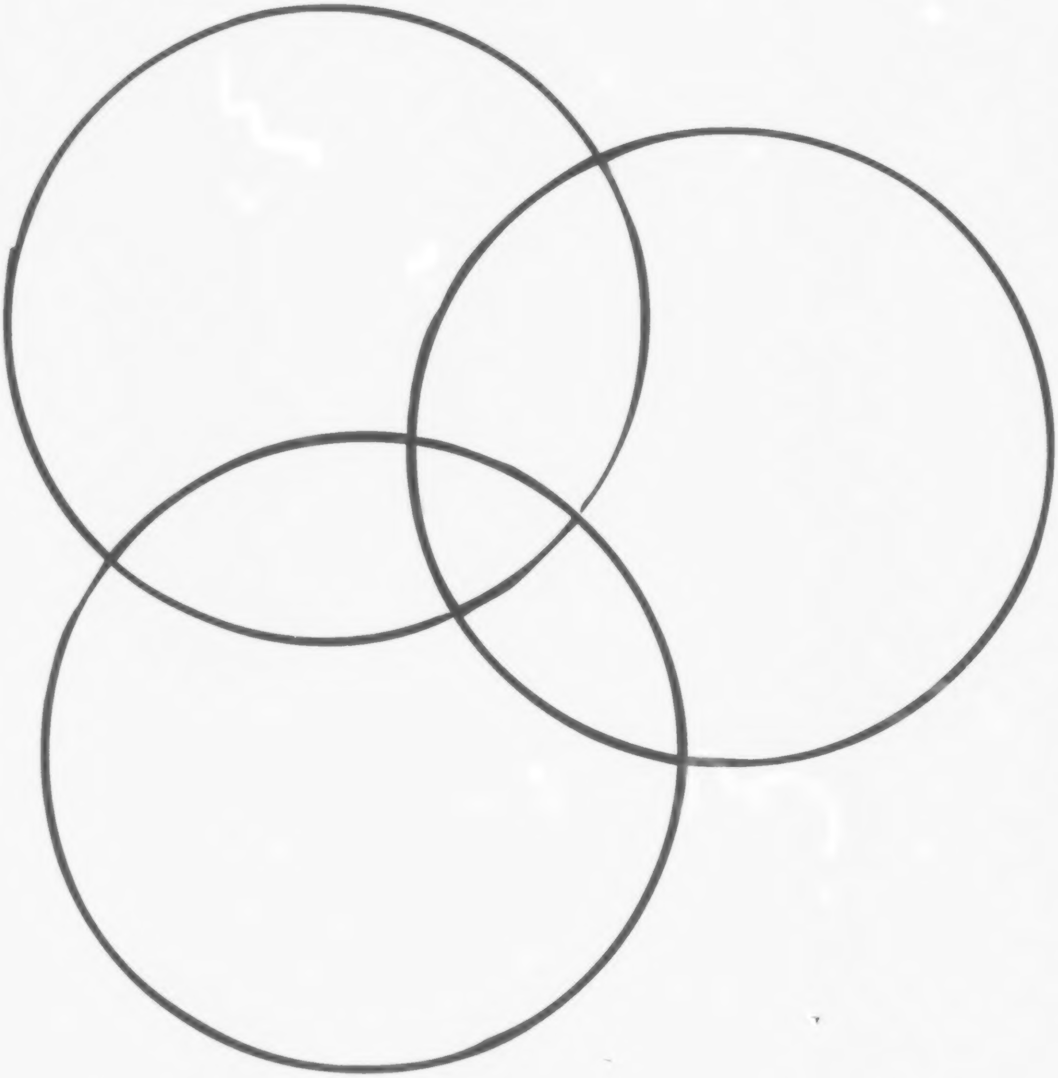
Name:____________________

Line Diagram



Name: ____________________

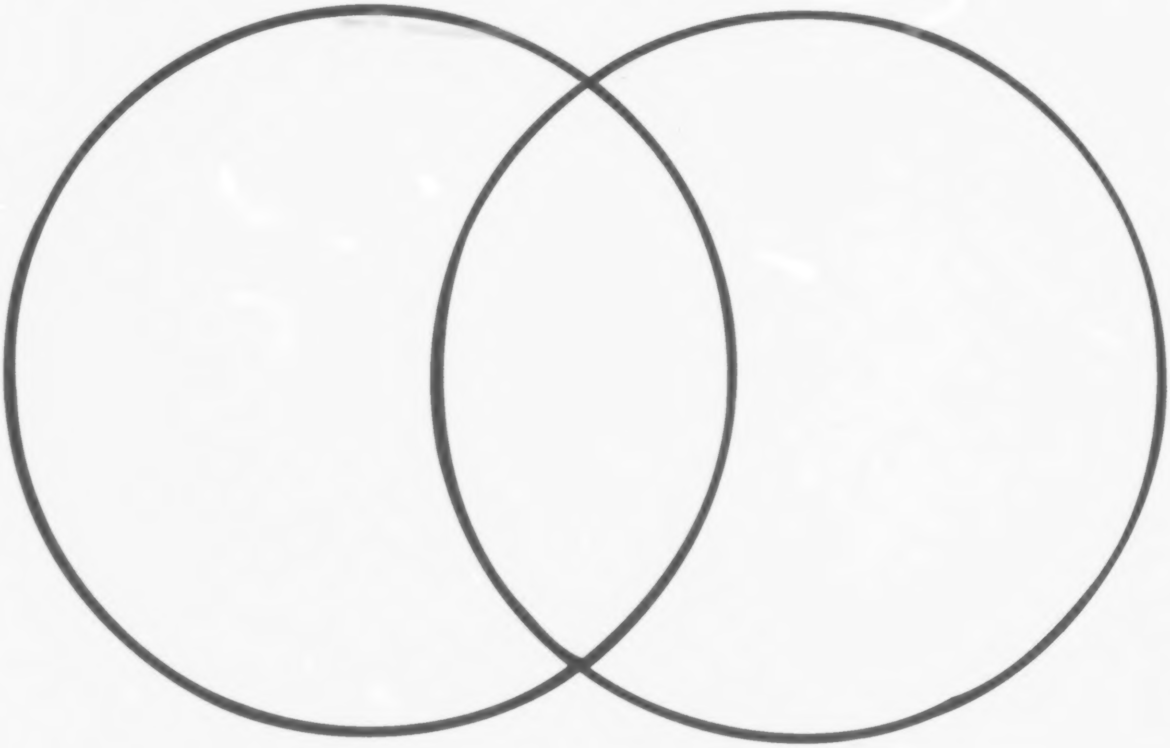
Venn Diagram: Where Ideas Meet



83

Name: ______________________

Venn Diagram: Where Ideas Meet



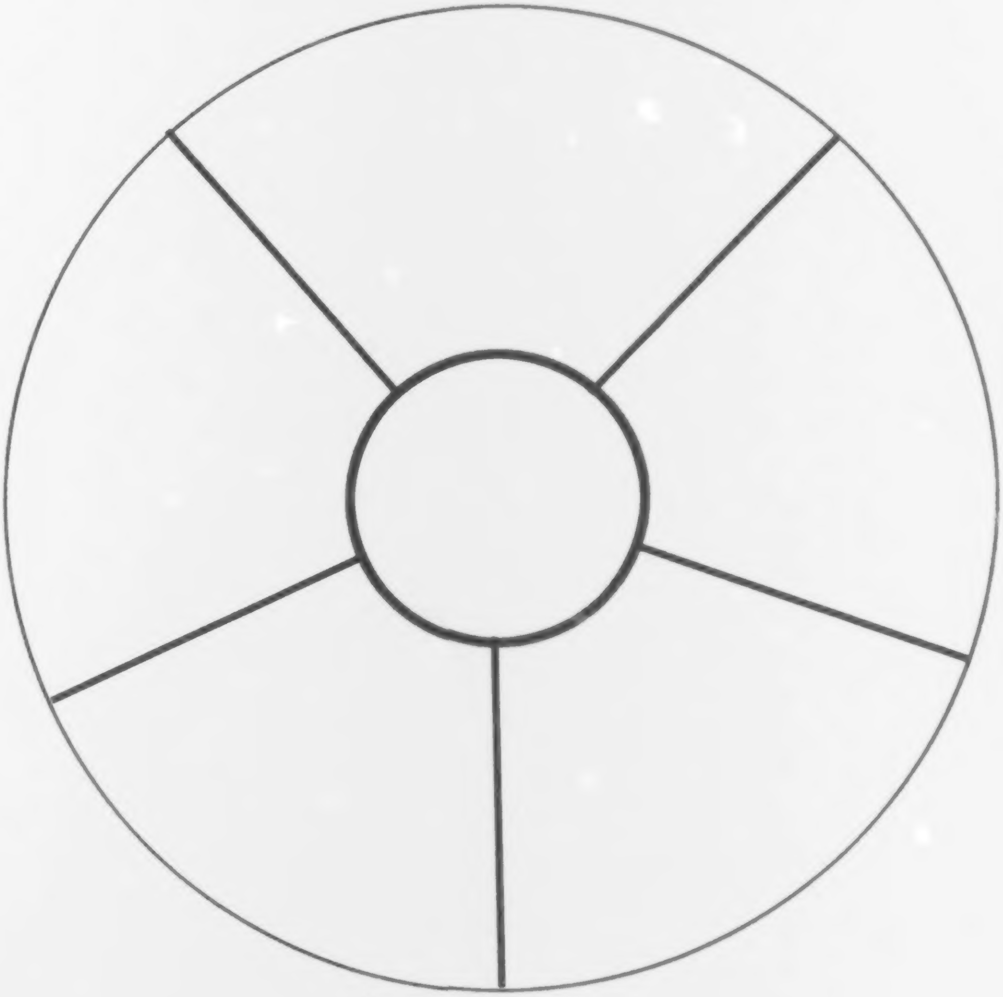
Name: ______________________

Key Ideas

Reproducible

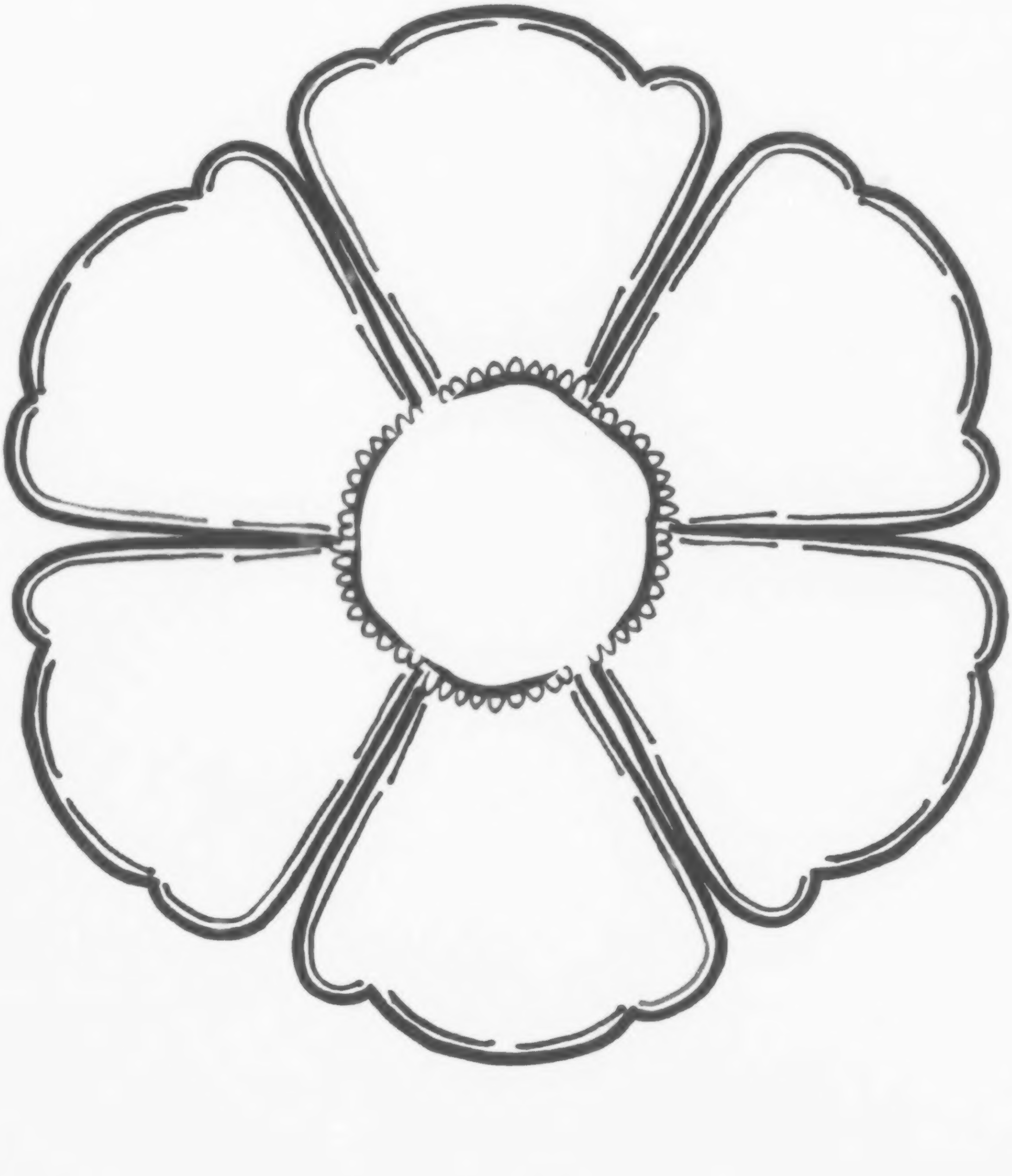
Name: ______________________________

Pie Chart



Name: ______________________

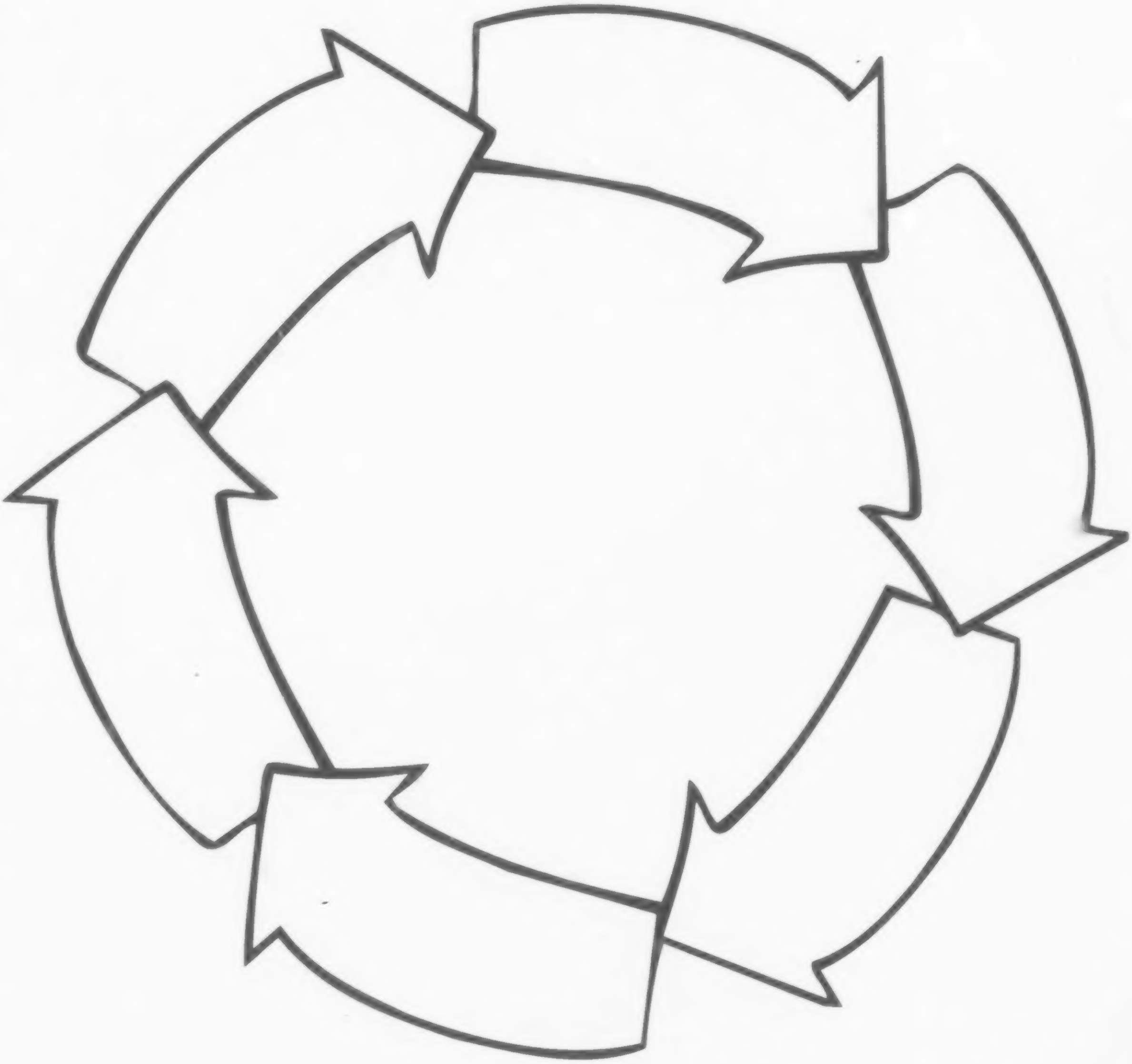
Petal Chart



87

Name: ____________________

Completing the Circle



88

Name: ______________________

A Story Map

Title ____

Author____

The story takes place ______________________________________

______________________________________ is a character in this story.

S/he is important because ___________________________________

____

____

____

A problem takes place when __________________________________

____

____

____

The problem is resolved when ________________________________

____

____

____

The story comes to an end when ______________________________

____

____

____

Composing the First Draft

> *"Writers engaged in serious composition seldom, if ever, attempt to accomplish all production components simultaneously, but generally go through a series of stages in which they focus on one or two aspects of the writing process at a time and produce multiple drafts before arriving at a final product."*
>
> —Levine 1999

Writing the rough draft is the first step in organizing information, putting thoughts into words, and developing the composition. The rough draft should be written without a lot of thought being put into neatness or the conventions of writing and spelling. When writing the first draft, students should give special attention to their ideas, organization, and voice.

The first draft is often called the "discovery draft." Drafting is a stage of reflection in which students should be engaged in the thinking process, with ongoing revision of the planning stage and the working draft. Students who have difficulties problem-solving or organizing may get "stuck" in this stage. These students often have difficulty rereading and modifying while writing, and transitions between ideas can be especially problematic. Students, *especially* those with problem-solving or organizational weaknesses, may overlook and omit essential components of the assignment or have trouble pacing themselves. Fortunately, scaffolding can assist them in breaking down the task into more manageable components. Help students build their ideas in smaller steps, and aid them in identifying areas of transition, organization, and problem-solving.

Students who have issues with attention may start out writing smoothly, but the quality of writing may begin to deteriorate as they struggle to maintain effort and persistence. These students will benefit from shortened writing periods and/or built-in stretch breaks to aid their focus. Students who are fearful of a blank page can be encouraged to start small. Give them an index card and the process won't seem so overwhelming.

During the drafting stage, encourage your students to write on every other line and use only one side of the page. This will make revision much easier, and they will have space to insert or change words and ideas or to write down questions as they arise. Using only one side allows students the option of "cutting and pasting," as we do on computers, to improve their organization. Students who have difficulties with the physical act of writing could dictate into a tape recorder or to another student, a parent, or a teacher. That student could also be directed to *temporarily* compromise neatness for the sake of ideation and elaboration.

Putting Thoughts Into Words: Holding That Pencil

Christian, a fourth grade boy, made me stop and think during one of our writing sessions when he asked, "Can we do something about my hand?" Upon questioning he said, "My hand's always playing stupid tricks on me!" He then went on to say that, sometimes, even though he thinks he is writing a *b*, it comes out a *d*. This is a boy with long-standing, subtle difficulties with attention. He also still has to think about *how* to form each letter, resulting in poor letter formation and a lack of fluency. Classroom modifications for attention have helped him academically, but clearly he is still bothered by this weakness. For students like Christian, having a model of the *abc's* to refer to can be very comforting and quite helpful.

> Many elementary teachers assume that handwriting is a skill that children learn informally, that handwriting will come easily and by osmosis, and that children will be bored by the repetition necessary for acquiring a reliable skill. (*Sheffield 1996*)

Children need to learn how to print or to write in cursive. For some students, the act of forming letters is a series of letter-to-letter decisions about where to put the pencil, which direction to swing, and how to *draw* letters. These decisions can markedly drain a student's short-term memory. Remember that practice makes permanent. It is easier for students to learn the correct way to form letters than it is to try to recall it each and every time.

Drawing a 9

The 4th grade teacher came to me in September. She was incredulous while relating this tale: She was sitting beside Jason during math, giving him a little one-to-one help. He easily gave the answer to 7 x 7, but when he went to write the 9, there was a problem. He simply sat, frozen. The teacher encouraged him, " Write the nine." He still sat, now clearly upset. Her finger moved to the space to write the 9. Still he sat. Then he pointed the pencil at the spot just touching the paper—left, right, left, right. "I don't know where to start drawing a nine."

Fortunately for Jason, the teacher gave him verbal cues, "Start at the top, swing around to the left for a small loop, drop down for the nine line." Then she gave him a few practices, some encouragement, and a promise that he could ask her anytime, if he would always try to make the numeral nine the same way.

I can just imagine this boy's relief when he discovered the teacher was going to help him learn to write the numbers so he would be able to do his math. We tend to take for granted that children will be able to look, visualize, and consistently recreate those abstract squiggles we call numbers.

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Alternative Writing Materials

There are students who have difficulty with the physical act of holding a pencil. They may rely on gross-motor movements of the forearm muscles rather than small-motor movements of the fingers. For these students, consider selecting from the wide variety of pens and pencils available for all types of hands. Spend some time in a local office supply store, where you will find a number of good, sturdy pens for students with poor fine-motor skills.

Keep the following implements within easy reach in the Authors' Corner or in the student's "Work in Progress" folder:

Pens

- The Bic Wide Body
- Pilot's Dr. Grip
- Paper WideMate Flexi-Grip Ultra

Pencils

For students who use heavy pressure, consider purchasing mechanical pencils. Sanford makes two varieties with easy grips.

- Mechanical pencils
  - Sidetrac
  - Ph.D.

- Triangular pencils
  - Handhuggers
  - Yikes

These pencils have helped many students master the standard three-point grip. Triangular markers and crayons are also available, in addition to a wide variety of grips, ranging from small foam tubes to sturdy, shaped rubber grips.

Recording Devices

A Dictaphone or tape recorder will allow students with graphomotor difficulties to "compose" prior to writing. This eliminates the initial difficulty of "holding the pencil." Now writing can be done at a later time and may be transcribed by the student, teacher, or parent.

Computer

For some students, the benefits of using a computer and keyboard will make all the difference in the world. Although all children should learn to write legibly, for many, word processing can free them from motor and memory troubles. But keep in mind that learning to keyboard may be very difficult for students who have motor problems, and, as a result, it should always be taught separately from the writing process.

There are many excellent software programs available, including, but not limited to:

- UltraKey
- Type to Learn
- Mavis Beacon for Kids

Keyboarding Program

- AlphaSmart Pro

This program is a great option for when a computer is not available. It lets students enter and edit text. It can be hooked up to a Macintosh or PC for further editing, formatting, and printing. It is less expensive than a computer and more portable.

Language Software and Word Processing Programs

- Don Johnston Products (Ph: 800-999-4660; web site: www.donjohnston.com)
    - Co-Writer: predicts words
    - Write Out Loud: reads text back to writer

The software above allows students to enter key or topic words, and it has built-in word retrieval predictors. From these entries the computer generates a list of possible words from which the students can choose to use in their writing piece.

Additional computer program resources include:

- textHELP (Ph: 888-333-9907; web site: www.texthelp.com)
  - WordSmith
  - Read & Write
  - Type & Talk
- Intellitools (Ph: 800-899-6687; web site: www.intellitools.com)
  - Intellitalk

For children with significant fine-motor delays, consider purchasing voice-activated computer software such as:

- Dragon Dictate or Dragon Naturally Speaking (Ph: 617-965-5200; web site: www.dragonsys.com)

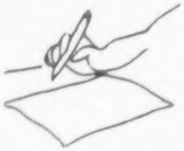
Computers are helpful tools because they recall how to form the letters, helping students, such as Jack (see page 184), who have motor memory problems. Students and teachers will find that revision is easier on the computer and final projects look neater. This type of aid is a real bonus!

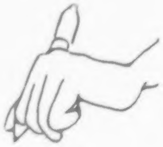
Instructional
Strategy

Motor Skills—Handwriting

"Handwriting is the vehicle carrying information on its way to its destination."
—Graves 1994

Whether or not we believe it, and in spite of whether or not we like it, our society often judges people on appearances. This is true about our writing, too. How our handwriting looks is often an important first impression on which many judge our educational status. If we're neat and accurate, we give one impression. If our writing appears messy and careless, we give another impression. As unfair and inaccurate as that may seem, it is nonetheless true.





Unfortunately, many teachers give very little time and effort to ensuring their students have a dependable vehicle for carrying their ideas, thoughts, and dreams, because in an effort not to stifle the creativity of our young students, many of us have stopped teaching handwriting on a regular basis. Or if we *have* shown the children how to correctly form the letters, we don't show them that we value good handwriting by expecting them to *use* what they have learned when they are composing pieces of writing. Many bad habits are solidified in this way. Fortunately, today, people are starting to speak out for better handwriting instruction.

> We need to restore and extend handwriting instruction from kindergarten to sixth grade (seventh when necessary). This will mean teaching teachers as well as kids; many of them . . . think handwriting instruction inhibits creativity. The opposite is true; it undergirds creativity. (*Vail 1996*)

Feeling confident with forming the letters fluidly as they write actually frees students from the drudgery of having to think about where to begin a letter and which way to move their hands so that a letter will look like the one they are visualizing in their heads. The goal of handwriting lessons and practice would be to get the child to write the letters *automatically*. At that point the child's energy is free to go into the act of constructing meaning.

> Mostly, we expect too little, especially with regard to editing, spelling, and legibility. We accept unacceptable work because we don't want to "interfere" with the creative process. In the name of "invented spelling," we permit students to misspell words they are capable of spelling. We let young students scribble or write without spacing and punctuation far longer than necessary. We fail to teach and expect legible handwriting. (*Routman 2000*)

There are correct and efficient ways to form letters. Simply requiring students to look at a model and then try to recreate the same basic shape is not good enough—it is confusing, in addition to being completely inefficient. Because the kinesthetic channel in the memory is strong and reliable, and we can access it very early on in a child's development, it makes sense to teach students correctly the first time so the procedure goes into their memory correctly. Otherwise we are asking their young muscles to unlearn and then relearn how to form letters, which is difficult and confusing.

Motor Skills: Handwriting

Portfolios

If, as a teacher, you choose not to use portfolios as a means for assessing all of your students' writing, please consider at least using a portfolio for your students with motor weaknesses. Children with fine-motor difficulties need to *see* that they can make progress.

Difficulty with writing is very hard to hide. Students with fine-motor problems may feel vulnerable as they recognize their own "failings" in neatness and content. Poor legibility takes away from the meaning and makes the reader focus on these more superficial aspects. Students with motor delays may compare themselves to others, and nothing impairs a "can-do" attitude more than an inability to see progress. Use of a portfolio with dated writing samples will allow students to begin to compare themselves against themselves over time.

Handwriting Warm-Ups

Prewriting exercises can be done by your entire class, but these exercises are especially important for students who have finger agnosia or who experience difficulty with their fine-motor skills. Handwriting exercises will prepare their hands for writing by stimulating the muscles, just as stretching prepares a runner for a race. They also provide a mental warm-up for writing. Teachers need to choose only a few prewriting exercises to use in each writing session. Below are some ideas:

- Place palms down on the desk and press. Hold for the count of five. Ask students to raise fingers one at a time. For example, "Now raise your thumb."
- Place palms flat on their desks. Ask students to spread their fingers apart and then slide them back together again.
- Have students open their hands wide, then close them into fists. Repeat this several times.
- Let students snap their fingers.
- Encourage students to touch each finger with the thumb, starting with the pointer going to the pinkie and then reversing.

ABC's for Fluency

Students in grades three through six should be able to write the alphabet legibly within a one-minute time period. To reinforce letter formations and build sequencing skills, there are several "Mad-Minute" activities (see below) that students will find helpful over time.

Your goal with these activities is to help students learn how to form each letter of the alphabet in the *correct manner* without having to think about "how to draw it." To facilitate this process:

- Provide 10 to 15 minutes *every* day of direct, intense practice.
- Use graphs or charts for simple and graphic feedback for student learning.
- Set student goals *with* the student.

Assure fluency and retention by helping students master their letters.

Mad Minute I

Set the timer. How many times can the students write the entire alphabet in one minute? Letters must be legible and well formed.

Mad Minute II

Set the timer. How many random letters can the students write legibly in one minute? For this activity, the letters must be well formed and in random order. This technique will increase the demand on memory while students are working to master correct letter formation.

Mad Minute III

This exercise is a more teacher-directed process than some of the others, but it too is another good exercise for increasing and testing memory. Ask students to take a look at a group of letter sequences in which one letter is missing. They have to figure out which letter is missing and write it in the appropriate space. For example, ask them to "Write the letter that comes between *s* and *u*."

You may also choose to dictate letter sequences or prepare a handout in advance so that students can time themselves.

Example: w x y c d e r s t h i j f g h b c d l m n

Graffiti Wall

Use a blackboard or place a large piece of paper on the wall. Have your students, especially the struggling writers, sign in at this designated spot each day and write a message about how they are feeling or about an event. Next, create a theme (e.g., words that are always capitalized or common misspellings). Perhaps have students brainstorm sayings that refer to writing ("It was written all over his face") or similes ("The lake was as smooth as glass").

To increase sensory feedback and help improve motor skills, place the paper over a rough surface such as brick, bumpy walls, or a window screen. Give students chalk or markers. (Try to use something other than a dry-erase board as the surface is less effective when it comes to providing a good tactile response.)

Is It *b* or *d*?

You may still get students in the middle grades with *b/d* confusions. Here is a strategy to try with these students:

- Have the student write the capital letter *B*.
- Is it reversed? If it is, show them the correct formation.
- If the *b* is not reversed, use this *B* as a mnemonic for remembering directionality.
- Show the student how the lowercase *b* is embedded in the capital *B*.
- Highlight it!
- Next, use a passage from a current classroom reading.
- Photocopy and enlarge a page or two.
- Have the student find and trace over all of the lowercase *b*'s "hidden" in the capital *B*'s within that selection using a marker or pen.
- Now ask her to locate all the lowercase *b*'s. Tell the student why you are doing this and how it will help her. Remind her that she needs to "call up" metacognitive awareness of this activity during writing time for carry-over into compositions.
- You may need to repeat this activity several times if the *b/d* confusion is well ingrained.

Name: ____________________

Getting Ready to Write

It may seem to you that it really doesn't matter how you hold your pencil, but an awkward pencil grip will make it more difficult for you to write. The further along you get in school, the more writing you will be required to do and the less time you will be given to do it. An appropriate grip will help with improved letter formations and you will be able to write for longer periods of time without tiring.

With your preferred writing hand:

- Pinch the end of the pencil with your thumb and pointer finger about an inch from the writing tip.
- Rest the pencil in the web space between your thumb and hand, then let the length of the pencil rest there.
- Slide your middle finger under the pencil. You will have a three-finger triangle around the pencil.
- Bend your ring and pinkie fingers into your palm and rest your hand on the table.

Now:

- Place your elbows on the table or desk. If you are right-handed, tip the top of your paper slightly to the left and tip your head gently to the left. If you are left-handed, tip the top of your paper slightly to the right and tip your head slightly to the right.
- Rest your arm on the paper.

You are now ready to write!

Instructional Strategy

Leads

Find and read examples of different types of leads found in the literature in your classroom or library (you would only present two or three options at one time to third and fourth graders). Suggested books include:

Stone Fox (John Reynolds Gardiner)
My Side of the Mountain (Jean Craighead George)
Bridge to Teribithia (Katherine Paterson)
Charlotte's Web (E.B. White)
Arthur's First Sleepover (Marc Brown)
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (John Scieszka)
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (J.K. Rowling)

- Read the beginning part of each chapter to your students and point out each story's captivating lead. Discuss *why* they are effective.

- Attempt to model some leads of your own! Ask for volunteers to share beginnings from their own writing, and offer alternatives from the types of leads on the previous list.

- Have a volunteer select the piece of his own writing, which, in his opinion, has the best beginning. Then have him rewrite his lead using one of the ideas you've presented.

For example:

> Begin with a **statement**: "*One sunny day I rode my bike to Joe's house. I crashed into the barn because I couldn't see very well.*"

The writer also might start his story by posing a **question**:

> "Have you ever been blinded by the early morning sun? Were you riding your bike at the same time?"

Or he may open with some **dialogue**:

> "Joe! Where are you? The sun is in my eyes and I can't see a thing! Look ou-ou-ou t . . . !"

After sharing the three different ways to begin this piece, discuss the pros and cons of each one. Then have the student choose the beginning that would create the mood he wants for his piece of writing. Continue to do this with individual students or with groups of students, suggesting they try different types of leads from the list.

Throughout the day, make sure you pay attention to your students' efforts to start off with interesting and exciting leads. Focus attention on effective leads during your teacher-student conferences, when reading aloud to the class, and during literature discussion groups. This is an opportunity to accentuate the reading-writing connection our students need to recognize.

See page 103 for more information on leads.

Name: ______________________________

Leads

A good lead will grab a reader's imagination, curiosity, or attention and will not let it go! A good lead will pull the reader into the information the author wants to share. It should introduce the author's topic in an interesting way and involve the reader right from the start! Leads can:

- Ask the reader a question
- Begin with a quotation
- Open the writing piece with dialogue
- Identify the main points
- Relay an amazing fact
- Create an unusual picture or image
- Show some action
- Describe the setting
- Introduce the character in an intriguing way
- Be a way of letting the reader know the author's feelings about the topic
- Use sound words, such as "*Crash!*" or "*Ka-boom!*"
- Command the reader to tackle action or consider an important point

Here is an example of a interesting lead:

> "Twiddle-twap, skiddle-scat. Twiddle-twap, skiddle-scat! Izzy-mat, happenstat; Twiddle-twap, skiddle-scat?!" were the first words out of Timmy's mouth one morning as he greeted his parents at the breakfast table, and only he and Rizzle, the family cat, knew why . . . .

Instructional Strategy

Composing Sentences

Writing begins at the sentence level and builds sentence-by-sentence, thought-by-thought. This can be an area of significant challenge to students with language difficulties or organizational weaknesses.

Children who struggle with writing may have wonderful ideas for writing while talking with teachers and classmates, but when they actually begin to write, you may note poorly developed ideas that are terse or stilted. Adam, a bright and talkative second grader, explained that he could never write because "the ideas only stay in my head for about three seconds!"

Simple sentence structure is commonly evidenced in the writing of struggling young writers, but as students get older and need to express more complex thoughts, they need to know how to develop a more complex style. Below are some ideas and strategies that may encourage authors to expand ideas and elaborate on their thoughts while composing.

- **Brainstorm lists of rhyming expressions** such as *helter-skelter; snug as a bug in a rug; see you later, alligator.*
- **Use the five senses**—*sight, touch, smell, hearing,* and *taste*—to expand ideas.
- **Dig for details:** Develop questions and ask the student to elaborate. For example, if the student writes about "My Dog," ask: Is it big? Does it bark? Does it chase squirrels? Does it lick you?
- **Include dialogue and quotations:** For example, the teacher may ask a student, "What, *exactly*, did that character say?"
- **Use Post-it notes:** Both the student and the teacher can use Post-it notes to jot down key ideas. Stick them right on to the student's paper as a reminder.

Composing Sentences Using the Pyramid

Selecting a sentence: Help students select a simplistic sentence from their writing. It must have the potential for elaboration and should be representative of the problem they have with their writing. Have students write that sentence at the top of the pyramid. (See sample on the next page.)

Adding detail and description: Guide students by asking probing questions about the subject of the sentence. Seek information on colors, tastes, sizes, and textures of the objects in the sentence. Ask about the feelings and actions of each subject. For your weakest writers, ask them to first answer the fundamental questions—*who, what, when, where, why,* and *how*—before they begin composing sentences.

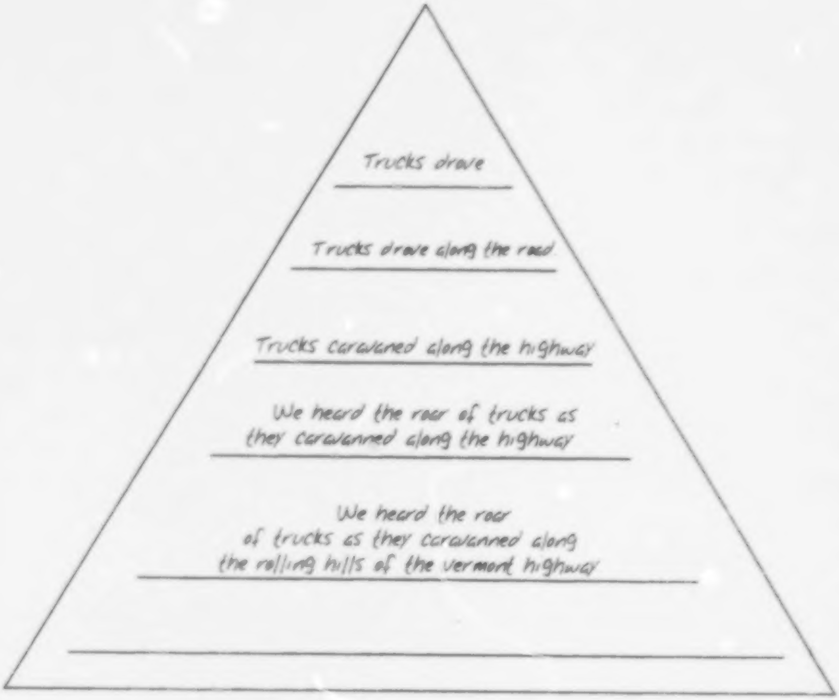
Now have students write their first sentence; then have them write a second sentence below the first, and then a third and a fourth, adding just one more detail each time. Sometimes the student may want to substitute one word for another in order to improve the quality of the sentence. This, of course, is fine!

Examining and evaluating the sentences: Have students read their work and notice the progression from a *skeleton* sentence to a *richer, fuller* expression of the original idea. Sometimes a student may not want an extremely wordy sentence, but she can usually find the best way to write it in the context of her story: Which words work well? Which get in the way? All of those judgment calls are an important part of evaluating one's own writing.

STUDENT GEM

"It all took place in the sunny, hot, and dry month of June."

—Jason, Grade 4


Trucks drove
Trucks drove along the road
Trucks caravaned along the highway
We heard the roar of trucks as they caravanned along the highway
We heard the roar of trucks as they caravanned along the rolling hills of the vermont highway

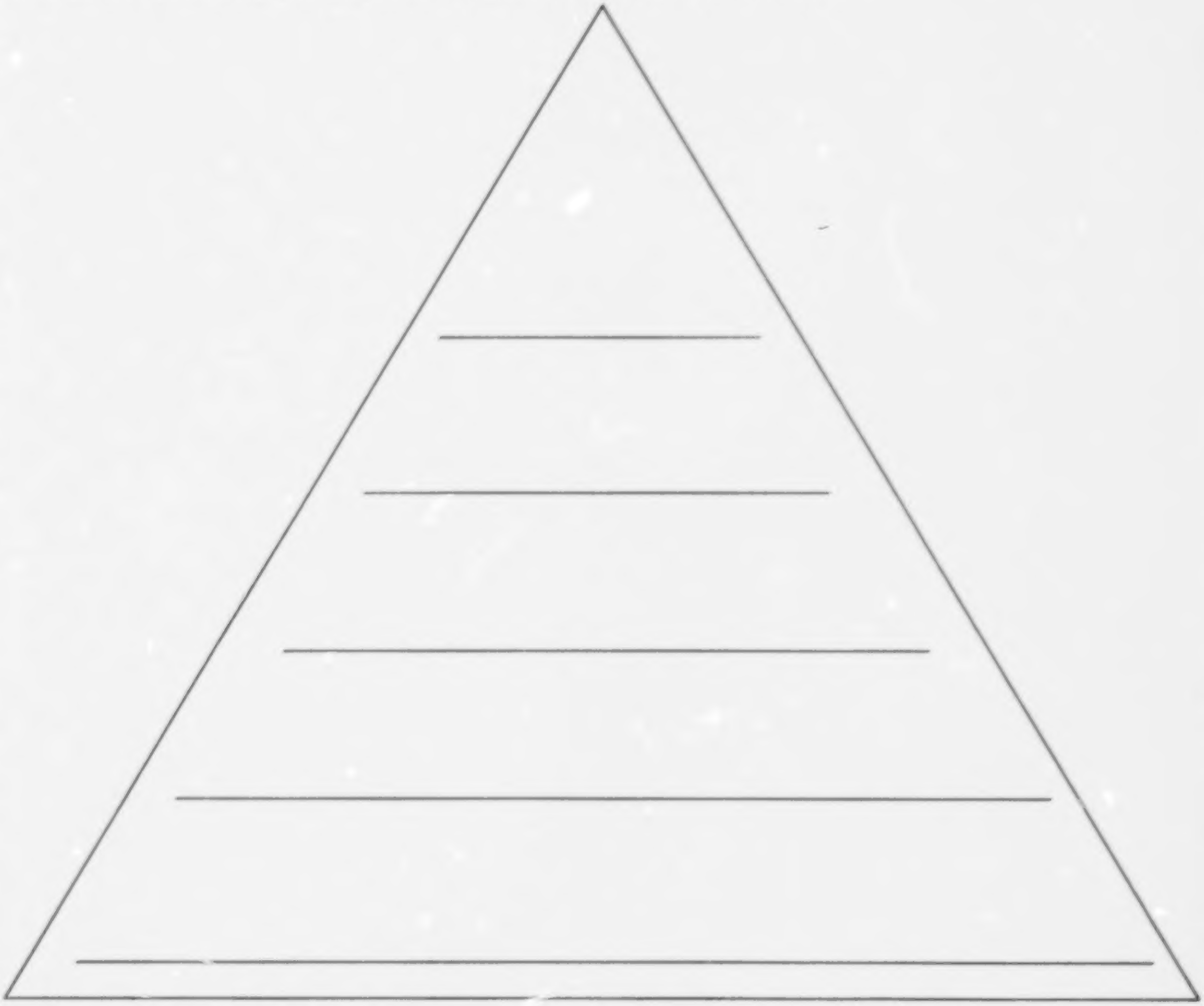
Continue to compose: The pyramid activity is meant to interrupt a bad habit or show a student who has weak language skills how to elaborate and *stretch* her ideas. Sometimes a student needs to see what she's doing (or *not* doing) and to have a concrete way to *change* that behavior. If she is aware, she will be much more likely to try to write more interesting sentences as she goes along. Have the student use this activity independently, as needed. (See page 107 for pyramid reproducible.)

Name: ______________________

The Pyramid

1. Begin at the top of the pyramid.
2. Select a very short sentence such as "I like my cat" from a piece of your writing.
3. Keeping those words on the next line, write it again, adding more detail.

Add one or two words onto each line. Sometimes you may substitute a better word for one you've used earlier, or insert a new word into the original sentence. Watch the idea grow as it moves down the pyramid! Compare your first and last sentences. Which one gives the reader more information? Which one is most interesting? Do you have too many words in a sentence? Should it be broken into more than one sentence?



Instructional Activities

Composing Sentences

Expressing ideas in writing begins with a sentence.

Recognize Students Who Compose Exceptional Sentences

Each week, choose a well-constructed, vivid sentence written by one of your students. Praise the student for this excellence and have the student rewrite it on a sentence strip for display on a bulletin board or in the Authors' Corner. Discuss with students your reasons for choosing this particular sentence.

Don't forget to look for sentences across the curriculum. Even sentences from math journals can be effective. Students love to be recognized, and they will respond to the respect of their classmates.

STUDENT GEM

"In the woods
in the back
of my house,
I have a rock
that looks
like a cake
with a piece
missing."

—Kay Grade 5

The Reading-Writing Connection

Use literature from your classroom reading program to draw your students' attention to the author's use of words and sentence structure. Reduce sentences down to the noun and verb. Look at the other words the author used to bring the sentence alive and expand its meaning.

Think about this sentence: "Mom was kneeling in the backyard, digging up dandelions and talking out the side of her mouth to the rosebushes," by the author Nancy Willard in *The High Rise Glorious Skittle Skat Roarious Sky Pie Angel Food Cake*. How different this sentence would sound if it just read: "Mom was kneeling."

Have students choose a sentence from one of their own current stories, then cross out every adjective and adverb. Together, revise the sentence using stronger nouns and verbs.

Example:

Step 1 my little dog was digging under the green plant
Step 2 my ~~little~~ dog was digging under the ~~green~~ plant
Step 3 my basset hound was burrowing under the juniper bush

Give your students a noun and a verb and ask them to write a good, strong sentence. Share and note both the similarities and the differences in their thoughts and ideas!

Create your own MadLib. Take a meaningful paragraph from the classroom reading program and delete some of the nouns, plural nouns, adverbs, adjectives, and verbs. Imagine altering this paragraph from *Absolutely Normal Chaos* by Sharon Creech.

> Not a real (exciting) day here. Mom left us all a note today saying we had to (wash) all the (windows) in the entire house. We called her at (work) to tell her it was (raining), but she said we had to wash the insides anyway. The worst thing is, you can't really SEE how much (work) we did, because the (windows) are still all (dirty) on the outside. I hope it's still (raining) tomorrow. I don't think I could take another day of smelling that (vinegar) and (toiling) my arm off.

Let students fill in the blanks using the appropriate part of speech, and let the laughter begin!

Adjective Arnold (or Annie)

Helping your students learn how to use colorful and interesting adjectives will lead them to use more accurate descriptors in their writing, thereby improving the overall quality of their sentences.

Using a large piece of paper (perhaps even child-size), draw the outline figure of "Arnold" or "Annie." Ask students to think of nouns for different parts of the body (hair, fingers, eyes, etc.). Then ask students to think of two or three adjectives to describe that noun. Using crayons or markers, have your students take turns adding their words to the outline sketch. Encourage them to use colorful and descriptive adjectives (e.g., *colorful* or *striped*) rather than common or vague adjectives (e.g., *nice* or *cute*).

This exercise is great for students who are visual learners or students with weak language skills as they can now view the visual along with the descriptors.

Armed with Idioms

This activity is similar to "Adjective Arnold," except you use idioms to describe the cut-out Arnold or Annie display.

From classroom or outside reading, start a list of idioms that in some way relate to people—"keep your nose to the grindstone" or "head in the clouds." Discuss what the idioms mean and speculate on how they originated.

Idioms and Alliterative Phrases

Descriptive Idioms

slow as molasses
big hearted
light as a feather
bird brain
cool as a cucumber
bright as a button
flat as a pancake
old as the hills
light as a feather
cold blooded
left holding the bag
tongue tied
smooth as silk
rotten apple
straight and narrow

Color Idioms

tickled pink
white as a ghost
once in a blue moon
green eyed monster
seeing red
red as a beet
scared yellow

Number Idioms

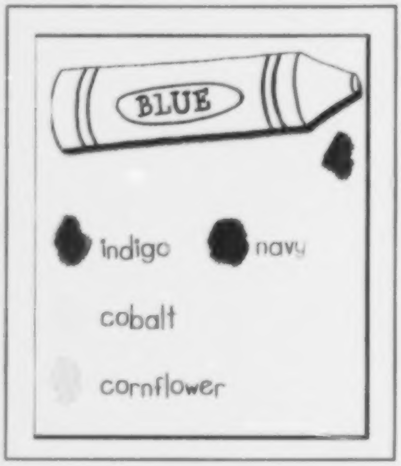
seventh heaven
two cents worth
on cloud nine
two peas in a pod
the whole nine yards
feel like a million

Alliterative Phrases

rough and ready
sweet and sour
cash and carry
slow and steady
light and lively
spic and span
good as gold

Kaleidoscope of Colors

Even in this new millennium, children get excited when they receive an extra-big box of crayons. So, buy a box and use this to your instructional advantage. Take some time to create a "Kaleidoscope of Colors." Divide up the crayons from a box of 64 or larger, keeping the basic colors (red, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, brown) for yourself. At the top of various pieces of chart paper or poster board, write the different color categories (red, yellow, orange, etc.), and make a mark of that color beside the color name. Post these pages about the room and ask students: "Does anyone have another kind of blue?" Invite students to look at their crayons, then, ask for volunteers. Have a student make a color mark with that crayon, and write the name of that shade of blue (e.g., indigo, cornflower, cobalt, etc.) beside it. Give the students time to roam about the classroom, using their various colors of crayons to mark the different sheets. These color charts could be kept in the Authors' Corner or displayed in a book format as a reference for your students.



Sentence-Prompt Booklets

You might choose to have students create small books of responses to open-ended sentence-starters. For example, staple five pages together, with one sentence-starter on each page. Provide time for students to think of and illustrate one well-developed sentence. By giving students only one sentence to work on each time, they can think carefully about word choice, grammar, and mechanics. For the reluctant writer, especially, one sentence seems easy when compared to the more typical lengthy writing assignment.

- If I could be a famous person from history . . .
- When it is hot . . .
- If I could change one thing about me . . .
- Learning to use . . .
- Hurry! You'll . . .
- If I became invisible . . .
- Suddenly I noticed that . . .
- The next time . . .

- Are you . . .
- You can make a . . .

If students have access to a variety of sentence-prompts, it will

- encourage them to develop quality sentences with varied structures, and,
- help them discover possible topics of interest for future free-writes or journal entries. (See page 40 for more ideas on sentence prompts.)

Sentence Types

- Declarative
- Imperative
- Interrogative
- Exclamatory

Discuss the four types of sentences with your class. Have students choose one noun and try to use that word in each different type of sentence. For students with language difficulties, they may find it difficult to use the same word multiple times, but this is good practice in developing their language skills. (See Digging Deeper into Language: Sounds in Words, page 172.)

For example, start with the word ***cat*:**

The ***cat*** is black. (declarative)

Put that ***cat*** down now**!** (imperative)

Who let the ***cat*** out**?** (interrogative)

That is one scared ***cat*!** (exclamatory)

Name: ______________________

A Sentence Is a Sentence Is a Sentence!

For each word, write four sentences—declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory. Try to make each sentence interesting.

Example: ***flying*** The birds are ***flying*** in formation.
Quit ***flying*** around this room!
Are you ***flying*** to California for vacation?
That fly is ***flying*** straight into the water!

1. Snow: ______________________
____
____
____

2. Car: ______________________
____
____
____

3. Stay: ______________________
____
____
____

4. Survive: ______________________
____
____
____

Reproducible

Instructional
Strategy

Building Paragraphs

Traditionally, a complete paragraph begins with a topic sentence, is followed by three supporting sentences, and is completed by a concluding sentence. Yet this organizational structure eludes many struggling young writers. As a result, these writers often skip from one idea to another with no rhyme or reason. These are the students who will benefit from the advance organizers, structured outlines, and prewriting activities.

The Reading-Writing Connection

Use literature from your classroom reading program to draw your students' attention to how the author has organized his/her writing. Type a page from a current story. Do not indent or separate the paragraphs. Let your students do that work. Ask your students to read the passage to themselves and try to determine where and why the author divided the writing into separate paragraphs. Discuss their responses with them. Then, encourage them to read the page and determine for themselves if they were correct and, if not, why not. This technique can be used in a similar manner for students who do not leave adequate space between words.

Jumbled Sentences

To help students learn how to organize for paragraph development, provide sample paragraphs in which the sentences are out of order. Have your students sequence ideas in paragraphs so the sentences make sense and follow a logical order. (This could be done in a more traditional manner by numbering boxes beside each sentence.) You might also consider using "jumbled sentences" to illustrate, or practice *cut and paste*. (For this activity you would have the students actually use scissors to cut the sentences apart and place them together into a more sequential pattern. See page 123 for a sample cut-and-paste session.) Below is an example of sentences that are out of order.

- Some tried flapping their arms, as if they were birds.
- They strapped these onto their bodies.
- They risked injury and death trying to fly through the air.
- They all learned that even people with feathers cannot fly.
- "Now we shall fly."
- They flapped and flopped.
- Since ancient times, people have wanted to fly.
- Some adventuresome people made large feathery wings.

Enhance your literature program by choosing selected paragraphs from stories and putting sentences into random order. Have your students determine the best sequence for a logical paragraph. It is possible that they may find more than one reasonable solution, but they will learn quickly, and in a meaningful way, that organization is important for communicating ideas.

Holding Student Conferences

Holding writing conferences with your students is a very important part of the writing process. In fact, this process cannot be successful without that ongoing exchange of questions and ideas. You may hold conferences with your students any number of times throughout the writing process, and teachers and students alike should be able to request conferences with one another in order to assess progress or simply check in.

The Content Conference

During a content conference, the writer may

- **recognize and understand** his own inner thoughts and feelings
- **clarify** ideas
- get some **help with organizing** the information
- **decide where more detail or supporting ideas** are needed
- **determine** whether or not he has **conveyed his thoughts and feelings effectively** to the audience

According to Donald Graves, "The purpose of the writing conference is to help children teach you about what they know so that you can help them more effectively with their writing" (1994). Graves also suggests that you approach your students with the following "notions in mind," which include:

- what the topic is about
- where the topic came from
- what students will write next

Sometimes a conference may consist of listening to the student's response to your first question and then helping him make a brief plan for what needs to happen next. It might take one or two minutes. At other times you might need to really help the student expand his ideas by asking prodding questions that stem from your own genuine interest in the student's topic. This is especially helpful for students who experience difficulty with expressive language. They need questioning that will *lead them to recognize the importance of their own thoughts.* This process might take longer, but try to keep your conference to less than five minutes. Too much information at one time can lead to overload.

Below is a sample conversation between a teacher and a student about a story the student is having difficulty writing.

Story
I went to Washington DC for a week. I had a good time.
I liked the Washington Monument.

Conversation

Student: "I'm done."

Teacher: "I just went to DC with my family in August! We had a great time, too. I would have a hard time choosing one thing that I liked best. Out of all the sites in Washington, why did you choose to tell your reader that you liked the Washington Monument the best?"

Student: "I don't know."

Teacher: "We had to wait in a long line before we could ride the elevator to the top. Did you?"

Student: "I never got to go to the top, but I really wanted to. I was really mad that they wouldn't let us go. It's so stupid that you have to have a ticket! We didn't have time to go back the next day, so we just looked up at it."

Teacher: That's too bad. We didn't know about the tickets, either, but we finally were able to get some and go up. Maybe you'll go another time. Could you write about your feelings that day? Would that be important to share?"

Student: "I guess so. Maybe if the other kids go sometime, they'll get tickets so that they won't miss it, too."

Teacher: "Try *showing us how* you reacted to the disappointing news. (Did you stamp your foot? Argue with the person at the ticket window? Cry? Walk with your head down?) I'll come back to read it at the end of the writing time."

If the student has a weak memory, you could write a few key phrases down on a sticky note and attach it right on her draft as a reference. (This is also modeling a strategy that could help the student in other situations.)

"I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think."

—Socrates

Conferencing

Effective Conferencing Questions

Note: Choose the questions that will best help the writer to think more deeply about his or her subject.

- Tell me more about . . .
- Do you have an audience in mind for this piece?
- What did you set out to do here?
- Why did you stop here? Is there more you could say?
- Let me tell you what I think you mean . . . Is that correct?
- How do you want me to feel about . . .? What words did you use to make that happen?
- Let's list some other words you could use instead of . . .
- Did you write a good lead?
- Have you thought about how you'll end this story?
- When I close my eyes I want to be able to picture where this is happening (setting). Will I be able to do that?
- Is your character like someone you really know? How did you decide what s/he would look like?
- Is there a "seed of truth" in this story? What is it?
- What is going to happen next?
- How do you think your friends will react when they hear your story? Why?

Revising for Meaning

"Many professional writers will tell you that the process of making changes, or revising, is the most exciting, challenging, and important part of writing."

—Sebranek, Kemper, and Meyer 1999

"Nothing you write, if you hope to be good, will ever come out as you first hoped."

—Lillian Hellman

Revising *is not* copying over. It is not redoing the same old work. Yet, many of our students see it as a negative process and believe that revising means "Fix your mistakes!"

Quality writing instruction ensures that our students begin to write with a plan—a vision—of what they are going to write about. Revision presents student authors with the opportunity to reread and ensure that their written piece presents their vision. In fact, revising their first draft gives student authors the ability to improve upon their writing and make their pieces more complete and well developed.

Revision means looking at the "big picture." This is the time for students to be attending to meaning, word choice, and purpose. This is not the time for students to be focusing on the mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar) of writing. Students may find it helpful to have other students, and/or the teacher, read their work and provide feedback. This is an excellent time for quality conferencing (see pages 20, 115–118 for more information on conferencing). Emphasize to your students the revision process may need to be repeated several times.

Theodore Geisel, better known to us as Dr. Seuss, was known to revise his writings many times before they developed into the stories he published. "He might fill a thousand sheets of paper with new ideas, changing them around as he goes . . . A book like *The Cat in the Hat* could take over a year to complete" (Norby and Ryan 1988).

Teachers, be sure to give your students time between drafts. It is very difficult for young writers, actually for all writers, to revise immediately after finishing the rough draft. This is especially true for struggling writers who may read the rough draft exactly as they believe they have written it, even though they have omitted words or phrases. Use the reproducible on page 120 to help students revise their first, second, third . . . drafts.

Name: ______________________

Student Revising Checklist

When you first reread a piece of writing, think about its **content**. What message is the author trying to get across to the reader? Has s/he been successful? If not, what ideas can you give that might help? Don't discuss the mechanics of the piece yet. **Make sure that the message is clear first**.

☐ Is the *lead* interesting? Does it grab the reader and pull him/her into the piece?

☐ Do the sentences *make sense* to you? Are they clear? Are they complete?

☐ Is there a *variety* of sentences? Are some short? Are some long? Are there questions as well as statements?

☐ Is there enough *description*? Is the vocabulary varied? Is there any use of *metaphor* or *simile*?

☐ Are the sentences in a *logical order*?

☐ Is the writer's use of *tense* consistent? (Make sure it doesn't jump around from the past to the future to the present without good reason!)

Revising for Meaning

Make It Clear

A good mnemonic for students to use during the revision process is W I R M I (pronounced "wormy"), which stands for **W**hat **I** **R**eally **M**ean **I**s . . . .

When students reread their own writing, they have the singular advantage of knowing what they meant to write. Periodically during the writing process, ask students to stop themselves and ask the question: Does what I'm writing make sense? While it may make sense to them, it may not be clear to others who pick up the composition, and therefore you could encourage writers to refer to an unclear or confusing places in their own or others' writing as a "WIRMI." The student author should respond with "What I really mean is . . . " and rephrase. This is where conferencing becomes so important. (See pages 20, 115–118 for more information about conferencing.)

Try asking these kinds of statements or questions to help the student articulate what he wants to express:

"I liked the part in your story where ___."

"When you wrote ___, did you mean ___?"

"When you said, ___, I pictured ___. Is that what you intended?"

Writer or Reader?

Another strategy to help young writers is to encourage them to read their own pieces aloud and to think like a reader, not like the writer. This is of particular importance for students who have trouble with problem-solving and organization. (Suggestions for self-directed revision are on page 120.) Questions students ask themselves might include:

- Does this make sense?
- Is this what I meant to say?
- Did I include important details?
- Do I have a good lead?
- Is my conclusion effective?

Cut and Paste

After students have written down their ideas, letting their thoughts and feelings just pour onto the page, they sometimes need to reorganize their thoughts or sequence the events in the piece. They might need to actually cut their story apart with scissors, then paste, glue, or tape them back together on a blank piece of paper, organizing as they go.

Here's how this process works:

First, photocopy the child's original draft so that he can compare the "before version" with the "after version." An easy way for the child to visually determine which details should be grouped together is to use different colored highlighters. Help the child highlight sentences or phrases that are closely related in one color and then change to a different color for the next group of ideas.

The next step is to cut the highlighted copy into strips and group all the yellow together, then the green, blue, pink, etc. Now when the strips of paper are all taped together, the story will be better organized. You and the student can compare it with the original draft and discuss if it is better reorganized and why.

At this point the student can make necessary revisions (add more detail, tweak vocabulary, etc.) before copying it onto a new sheet of paper. This concrete activity is a very powerful way of showing a student that writing is a fluid process that naturally calls for revision. For new writers who are unwilling to cross anything out or even add more detail above their carefully scripted words for fear of "messing up" their work, seeing the teacher cutting apart their work can be traumatic! (That's why we recommend making a copy of the draft and not actually destroying the child's original work.) The students begin to realize, however, that writing something once and not reconsidering the ideas, vocabulary, or structure is not an option! Good writers revise *often*, and it's not always pretty! Eventually, students learn to use and appreciate the cut-and-paste technique and what it can do for them and their writing.

The following is an example of a "before and after" cut-and-paste session:

Sentences: Out of Order

We decided to continue up the mountain (after all, it wasn't raining), but as the rumbling thunder grew louder, Ben started to shake harder.

Heather met me at a little before 9:00 a.m., and when we left my parents' house the sky was a deep blue, with only a few clean white, fluffy clouds—a perfect day for a hike!

By the time we reached the top of Tenney, it was pouring rain and the thunder and lightning pounded and flashed overhead; Heather and I—not to mention Ben—were nervous.

It was a warm and sunny Saturday morning, so my best friend Heather and I decided to go for a hike up Tenney mountain.

We arrived at the mountain around 9:15 a.m. with Ben, my family's golden retriever, who trotted along ahead of us on the rocky path.

About halfway through our hike Ben stopped in his tracks—he had heard thunder!

After helping a student cut apart and rearrange his work, you could show him how a computer does the same thing for you as part of its word processing capabilities. It is comforting to a student whose work is in tatters to understand that cutting and pasting is a standard practice used by lots of people in order to make their message clear!

Sentences: In Order

It was a warm and sunny Saturday morning, so my best friend Heather and I decided to go for a hike up Tenney mountain.

Heather met me at a little before 9:00 a.m., and when we left my parents' house the sky was a deep blue, with only a few clean white, fluffy clouds—a perfect day for a hike!

We arrived at the mountain around 9:15 a.m. with Ben, my family's golden retriever, who trotted along ahead of us on the rocky path.

About halfway through our hike Ben stopped in his tracks—he had heard thunder!

We decided to continue up the mountain (after all, it wasn't raining), but as the rumbling thunder grew louder, Ben started to shake harder.

By the time we reached the top of Tenney, it was pouring rain and the thunder and lightning pounded and flashed overhead; Heather and I—not to mention Ben—were nervous.

Strong Word Choice

Good writing is clear and concise. Among other steps, beginning or struggling writers need to learn how to get to the point and use words that most accurately convey their thoughts.

In helping our students learn to become more efficient writers, we can teach them about using strong nouns (*canine* v. *dog*) and vivid verbs (*amble* v. *walk*). They should be able to use comparisons (*bright as a button*) and effective descriptors (*colossal* v. *big*) to help their readers visualize, putting clear pictures into their readers' minds. We want the flavor of their writing to be *spicy*, not *bland*!

Use some of the following instructional activities with your students to enhance their vocabulary!

A Close-Up Look at Feelings

It is much more interesting and memorable to *show* how a character is reacting to a situation than it is to simply *tell* your reader how the character is feeling or what she is thinking. Written below are several effective ways to get this idea across.

Describe a recent encounter with a friend or fellow teacher. (This encounter can be real or fictitious. If you are describing an actual person, be sure to forewarn him!)

> *I saw my friend Sam last night at my son's soccer game. He was jumping up and down, cheering, and he kept punching the air, yelling, "Yes!" When I went near to him, he threw his arms around me and hugged me!*

Ask the students how they think Sam was feeling at that point in time. What if you had described him this way:

> *Sam had his hands in his pockets and was quietly kicking a pebble with the toe of his shoe. He was staring at the ground, looking at the game only occasionally. When I approached him, he barely looked me in the eye and muttered, "Oh . . . hi."*

- How does Sam feel this time?
- How do you know?
- What clues does his body give you?

Follow up this type of discussion by creating "Feelings Posters" that show what feelings *look like*. Make a list of several different feelings and divide the class into small groups. Each group should take one feeling and make lists of as many "clues" that best describe the emotion as possible. When the whole class meets again, each group can read their clues and let the others guess which feeling they are describing.

Feelings might include:

happy
ashamed
nervous
sad
shy
angry
amazed
shocked
tired
afraid
embarrassed
amused

Making Individual Thesauruses

The purpose of this activity is to expand a student's vocabulary, giving him more options when choosing the most effective words possible for his story.

The sheets on pages 135 and 136 can be used with a group of students at the beginning of a writing session as a warm-up, or they could be used as part of a mini-lesson about synonyms. In either case, you need to decide what level of support your students need. You may want to model the procedure a few times and then have them work independently, or you may need to do all of the sheets together as a group.

You will notice that a commonly used word is listed at the top of each page. The challenge is to think of as many words as possible that have a similar meaning to the original word. The first letter of each word is given. The students fill in the blanks with the correct number of letters. They might also illustrate the meaning of the group of words on that page. This will help visual learners and students with language weaknesses develop visual images.

Here's a sample entry:

happy

*g*lad
*ch*eerful
*e*cstatic
*p*leased
*j*oyful

Give each child a copy of the first page of his thesaurus (see page 135) and ask him to think about the word *happy*. Depending on the age and sophistication of the group, choose some questions like the ones below to ask.

- What does a happy person look like?
- Can you draw a happy person's face?
- What are other words we use that mean *happy*?
- How are the words on this list alike? Different?
- In what type of situation would we use *ecstatic* instead of *glad*?
- Can you think of any other words that mean *happy*? Go ahead and add them to your list!

Now, give each student a second page (see page 136), cut the pages apart, punch holes in the corners, and make little individual books for the children to use as a reference. Have them keep their new thesauruses in their writing folders. The students can make additions to them any time.

This Is a Nursery Rhyme???

This is a second thesaurus activity to help students build their vocabularies. This is very important for children who have difficulties with our language. After a mini-lesson to explain the thesaurus, give your students some practice using it. Challenge them to identify the common nursery rhymes on page 137.

Take this activity one step further. Have students find synonyms to replace words with their favorite familiar nursery rhymes. Allowing students to work in pairs or small groups, editing for accuracy of word usage and then swapping creations, will provide you with more opportunities to get students to use the thesaurus or dictionary and expand their vocabularies.

"Ebony Bovine"

Said Is Dead

This activity will help writers expand the use of the word *said*. Students in grades three and four, in particular, have discovered the use of dialogue in their stories. Typically, they employ a "*he said, she said*" type of approach.

A		💡

"*Said* Is Dead" can be used any time during the school year (although it might have most impact at Halloween). Get creative! Make a "tombstone" from a piece of cardboard or foam board. "Honor" the word *said*, then "put it to rest." Brainstorm a list of possible substitutions for the word *said*, then have students look through classroom literature, dictionaries, a thesaurus, or any other references, for additional words. List these words on the tombstone. Prominently display this in the classroom and have students make a copy for their writing folders (see page 138). Bow your head "in mourning" when a student uses the word *said* in writing over the next few days, and ask him to substitute a word from the chart.

Nouns and Verbs: *Strong* v. *Wimpy* and *Vivid* v. *Boring*

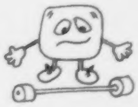
Was it an ordinary snake or a boa constrictor? Think of the popular children's story *The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash* by Trinka Noble. Imagine the change in image if this author had used *snake* instead of *boa*. Help your students eliminate general nouns/verbs for words that are more specific.

Here's what to do:

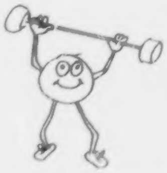
Over a period of time, collect samples of your students' work. Analyze the most frequently used nouns or verbs. Focus on only one part of speech at a time in order to facilitate student mastery of one before asking them to move on to another. Engage your students—*the word wizards!* Have students search for and write words that are newer, stronger, or clearer under the dull or overused words. Create a colorful chart for display!

Follow up with selected sentences from classroom literature. Practice substituting and noting the differences between strong words and more general, overused words.

Example:



He *went* up the long, windy staircase.



He *crept* up the long, windy staircase.

The lost dog *ran* past my window.

The lost dog *flashed* by my window.

Give Me a Break!

Some words are overused and overtired. They need a well-deserved rest! Help draw your students' attention to other words that might be used instead of the "same old, same old," and give them a break! (See page 139.)

Attributes

Young authors who are struggling with the formation of ideas and the development of their vocabulary will benefit from this group activity. Use this technique to elicit more elaborate detail from the writer.

List the following attributes so the group can see them clearly. Write them on chart paper or on cards that can be attached to a bulletin board, whiteboard, chart, or wall.

color
number
size
shape
material
weight
texture
age
proximity

Begin by telling the students that you want them to help you describe an important object in a story you're writing. Lead them into the situation with which you want help. For instance, "I was strolling along the beach, watching the seagulls overhead, when suddenly I tumbled over an object sticking out of the sand. It looked like a treasure chest!"

Now ask you students to turn on their "internal screen" or "form an image in their minds" of the scene you've just described. Then, point to one attribute at a time, asking for possible words that would describe the treasure chest's size, color, weight, age, and any other attributes. After listing their adjectives and considering which words would fit best, work as a group to write good, descriptive sentences.

The next step is to ask students to pick out a section of one of their own pieces and, perhaps working with a partner, go through the same procedure. Writers can work alone or with a partner. Give students a sheet with a list of attributes (see page 140).

Instructional Activities

Suffix Collection

Students can greatly expand their vocabulary and their ability to write clear and meaningful pieces if they understand how some of the words in our language are constructed. During a mini-lesson, explain that suffixes are added to root words in order to alter their meaning.

For example:

-ful means "full of" and *-less* means "without." When either one is added to a root word such as *help*, the meaning of the word changes: *helpful/helpless*.

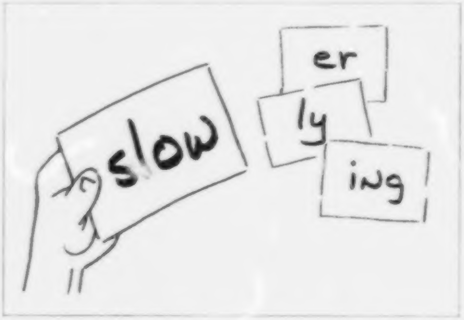
A suffix can also change a word's function in a sentence or part of speech.

For example:

slow is an adjective, but when you add *-ly* it becomes an adverb describing *how* something is done.

Children who learn visually will benefit from seeing how words change, so in order to better assist students, create cards that manipulate the root words and the suffixes. Games such as "Go Fish" and "Concentration" are fun and instructive activities that work well when teaching suffixes. Be creative!

Direct your students to make suffix word collections, which they can keep in their writing folders as a reference. You'll be surprised at how excited they will be to discover and collect these words! (See page 141.)



Flow of Thought: Using Transitions

Young authors may have trouble writing transitions and they may need to revise their compositions for cohesiveness of thought and structure. Teach transition and sequence words and phrases to students in order to give them a way to easily shift from one idea to the next.

Without transition: *My cat died. I felt lonely and sad.*

With transition ("since then"): *My cat died. Since then I have felt lonely and sad.*

Struggling writers should have lists of these transition and sequence words and phrases in their "Work in Progress" folders. (See page 142 for a list to use with your class.)

Sounds of Our Language

Students with weak phonological skills often have difficulty discriminating between similar-sounding words, such as *comb* and *cone*. This uncertainty can have a profound impact on their understanding of words, directions, and spelling, and as a result, these writers tend to rely on the same words over and over again because they are safe and they know how to use them.

Hinky-Pinky is an activity that will help students who have difficulties with vocabulary and/or rhyming and discriminating individual sounds in words develop language and phonological awareness skills.

Hinky-Pinky: This fun exercise draws your students' attention to sounds in words through a fun rhyming game! To play, think up a rhyming pair of words and give a nonrhyming clue to the other players. They must then discover the rhyming pair. For example, an *obese feline* is a *fat cat*. If players cannot come up with the response, provide a clue of each initial letter—*f, c*, or another key letter. Several examples are provided below, but be sure to have your students create their own Hink-Pinks, Hinky-Pinkies, or Hinkity-Pinkities! (See page 143 for a reproducible.)

Examples:

- chief of police = top cop
- lollipop on the beach = sandy candy
- large toupee = big wig
- humorous coins = funny money
- Santa's advice = Remember December

STUDENT GEM

"My dogs' name is Zeus but we call him 'Zeus Caboose'."

—Celia, Grade 3

Transitions: When working with transitions, give students a "Ticket to Go." Use this time to boost students' awareness of sounds in words or provide practice with math facts, state capitals, or other short facts tailored to your students' needs. When asking students to line up, call them with a specific task.

- Say *pest* without the *s*—pet
- Say *least* without the *t*—lease
- Say *blast* without the *b*—last
- Say *grow* without the *r*—go

Little words within big words: Provide students with a selection of words (use only words with two or more syllables). This activity will help students discover spelling patterns.

- Find five words in *teacher*—teach, each, tea, her, ache
- Find six words in *string bean*—string, ring, in, bean, be, an
- Find seven words in *grandfather*—grand, ran, and, fat, her, father, at
- Find seven words in *thermometer*—the, her, he, mom, met, me, meter
- Find six words in *important*—import, tan, an, ant, imp, port

Bernard Most has incorporated this type of wordplay into *There's an Ant in Anthony*. Play off this idea and help your students build sentences using little words found in big words.

Example:

Her mom and *he met me* at *the meter* with *the* *thermometer*.

Rhymes: Rhymes are a fun type of wordplay that help students organize their work and learn tricky spellings. Remember the old adage "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking!" Other spelling tricks to try include:

- *I* before *E*, except after *C*, or, sounding like /ā/, as in *neigh*bor or *weigh*.

- "The one-*l* lama, he's a priest. The two-*l* llama, he's a beast.
  And I will bet a silk pajama, that there isn't any three-*l* lllama."
  —Ogden Nash

Linking words: Use words that sound alike or smaller word parts together in a sentence to help improve memory for spelling words.

- He ***often*** buys a book *of ten* tickets.
- An ***island*** *is land* with water all around it.
- If you ***own*** a chair, sit *down*.
- If you b*ang* the door in ***anger***, it could mean d*anger*.
- I will be your fri*end* to the ***end.***
- There's ***a rat*** in sep*arate*.

Acrostics: This mnemonic device has helped many students remember a sequence for editing, spelling difficult or tricky words, and remembering other bits of information.

- *COPS* Editing: ***C***apitalization, ***O***missions, ***P***unctuation, ***S***pelling (see page 149)
- Geography: ***G***eorge ***E***lliot's ***o***ld ***g***randmother ***r***ode ***a*** ***p***ig ***h***ome ***y***esterday.
- Could: ***C***ome ***O***scar, yo***u*** ***l***ike ***d***onuts.
- Arithmetic: ***A*** ***r***at ***i***n ***t***he ***h***ouse ***m***ay ***e***at ***t***he ***i***ce ***c***ream.
- The compass rose: ***N***ever ***E***at ***S***hredded ***W***heat.
- The treble clef: ***E***very ***g***ood ***b***oy ***d***oes ***f***ine.

Instructional Activities

Homonyms: Help your students learn and discriminate the difference between homonyms—words that sound alike but have different meanings. This can be a very humorous experience if you show your students how they can laugh at their mistakes while learning. "We Knew the News" (see page 144) is an exercise in which writers can try their hand at using and illustrating homonyms in writing.

Perhaps nobody illustrates this type of confusion better than Fred Gwynne does in *A Chocolate Moose for Dinner*, in which a little girl believes she will be eating a moose made out of . . . of . . . of course—chocolate! Other similar titles by this author include *A Little Pigeon Toad* and *The King Who Rained*. Marvin Terban's book *Eight Ate: A Feast of Homonym Riddles* will give children a laugh while learning these hard-to-discriminate words.

Name: ______________________

Individual Thesaurus

happy

g _ _ _

p _ _ _ _ _ _

j _ _ _ _ _

e _ _ _ _ _ _ _

mad

a _ _ _ _

d _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

u _ _ _ _

d _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

big

l _ _ _ _

e _ _ _ _ _ _ _

g _ _ _ _ _ _ _

h _ _ _

little

s _ _ _ _

t _ _ _

m _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

p _ _ _ _ _

Answers: **happy/** glad, pleased, joyful, ecstatic
mad/ angry, displeased, upset, disappointed
big/ large, enormous, gigantic, huge
little/ small, tiny, miniature, petite

Name: ______________________

Individual Thesaurus, page 2

laugh

g _ _ _ _ _

ch _ _ _ _ _

sn _ _ _ _ _

s _ _ _ _

cry

w _ _ _

s _ _

p _ _ _

w _ _ _

pretty

b _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

g _ _ _ _ _ _ _

h _ _ _ _ _ _ _

st _ _ _ _ _ _

smart

i _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

b _ _ _ _ _

w _ _ _ _

i _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Answers: **laugh/** giggle, chuckle, snicker, smile
cry/ weep, sob, pout, wail
pretty/ beautiful, gorgeous, handsome, stunning
smart/ intelligent, bright, witty, inquisitive

Name: ______________________

This Is a Nursery Rhyme???

Use a thesaurus to unravel these nursery rhyme character clues.

Example:

Siblings who sauntered up an increasing altitude= *Jack and Jill went up the hill.*

1. Pint-sized damsel who could not keep her often-shorn animals =

____

2. A trio of rodents with no vision who pursued the spouse of the agriculturist =

____

3. Sleeping masculine child still wearing anklets and a single piece of footwear =

____

4. Skinny wedded male unable to ingest any form of suet =

____

5. United Kingdom structure in a state of collapse that allows transportation over the river =

____

6. An azure tiny lad who exhales into his bugle =

____

7. Ebony bovine in ownership of triplet containers of fleece =

____

8. Elderly jovial sovereign =

____

9. The female monarch who used her culinary abilities to create pastry treats =

____

Answers

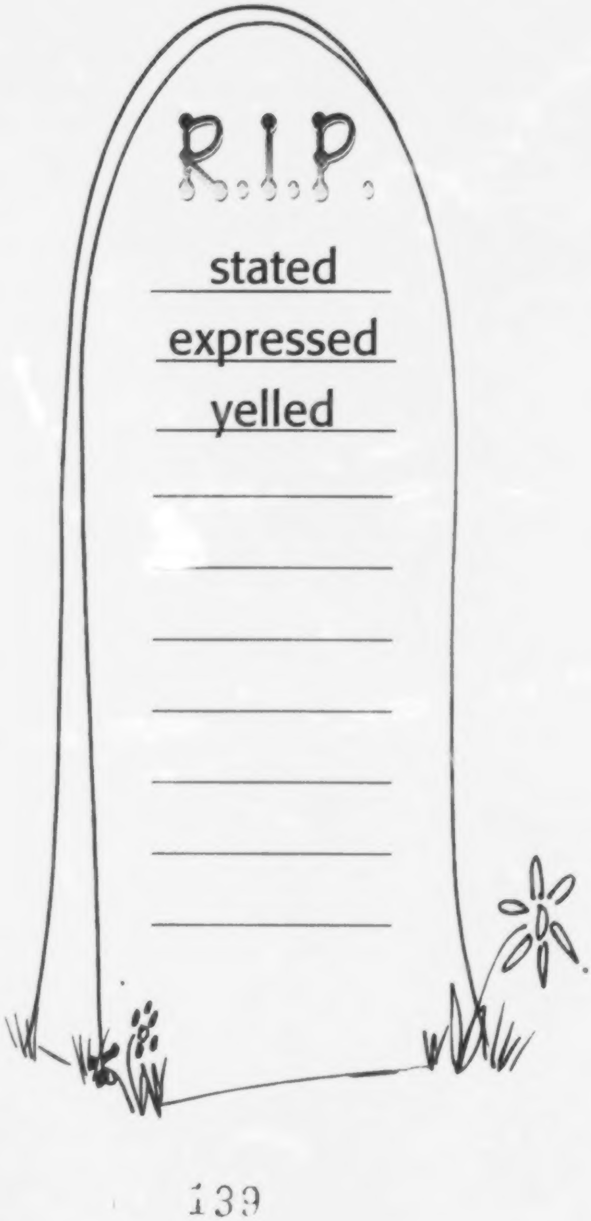
1. Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep 2. Three Blind Mice chased after the farmer's wife 3. Diddle-Diddle Dumpling; My Son John 4. Jack Sprat could eat no fat. 5. London Bridge is falling down. 6. Little Boy Blue come blow your horn 7. Baa Baa Black Sheep with three bags full. 8. Old King Cole was a merry old soul. 9. The Queen of hearts who made the tarts

Reproducible

Name: ______________________

Said Is Dead

Word collections can help you choose a wide variety of vocabulary for your writing. Build up your word collections to eliminate those "worn-out words."



stated

expressed

yelled

Name: ______________________________

Give Me a Break!

Some words are overused and overtired. They need a well-deserved rest! Why not **give them a break**? Find a word or phrase that better describes the situation and put it to work!

Instead of . . .	**Why not try . . .**
We had a ***great*** time.	interesting memorable joyful wonderful
It tasted ***good***.	delicious scrumptious tangy
I was ***sad***.	frustrated angry upset blue
It was ***fun***.	exciting enjoyable worthwhile adventurous

Now *you* try giving some other words a break! Try these:

She was ***nice***.

He got ***mad***.

It was ***big***.

Name: ____________________

Attribute List

color

shape

size

number

age

material

weight

proximity

texture

Suffix Word Collection

-ness	**-ment**
-ly	**-some**
-less	**-ful**

Name: ______________________

Transition and Sequence Words and Phrases

for example
for instance
after
and so
therefore
although
however
in general
of course
unless
because of this
nearby
at the same time
meanwhile
also
likewise
yet another
above all
long after
now that
since then

in the first place
another example
but then
then
next
next in order
as soon as
before
during
finally
from now on
previously
throughout
first . . . second
in addition
lastly
to continue
later
furthermore
and then again
indeed

Name: ______________________

Hinky-Pinkies

How do you play **hinky-pinky**? Think of two rhyming words like *ocean motion*. Now think up a definition. For *ocean motion*, it could be "What makes people seasick?" *Ocean motion* is a hinky-pinky because each word has two syllables.

A **hink-pink** contains two rhyming words, with each word having one syllable. For example, "the actor's automobile" would be the *star's car*.

A **hinkity-pinkity** is made up of two rhyming words. Each word contains three syllables. For example, "What advice might Santa Claus give?" *Remember December*!

Hink-Pinks

1. Inexpensive adult lambs: ______________________

2. Playthings for young lads: ______________________

3. Jewelry for a bird's arm: ______________________

Hinky-Pinkies

4. An imitation small horse: ______________________

5. Happy Christmas greenery: ______________________

6. Tiny portable spaceship: ______________________

Hinkity-Pinkities

7. The sound of feline footsteps: ______________________

8. A frozen two-wheeler: ______________________

9. Suspicious looking parson: ______________________

1. Cheap sheep 2. Boys' toys 3. Wing ring 4. Phony pony 5. Jolly holly 6. Pocket rocket
7. Kitty-cat pitty-pat 8. Bicycle icicle 9. Sinister minister

Name: ______________________________

We Knew the News

Draw a caption to go with each pair of words. Next, write a headline to go with your illustration.

For example: The prince read the blue prints.

bare bear

desert dessert

heard herd

knight night

rows rose

witch which

Editing: The Conventions of Written Language

The writer has finished crafting the piece of writing. The lead is interesting, the descriptions are accurate, and all the necessary details are there. "I'm done!" the student will announce. But that's not quite the case. It is now time to *polish* the work and make it *shine*!

Many teachers struggle with deciding how much emphasis they should put on this stage of the writing process. Some think that we want our students to write meaningful, concise pieces that will make their readers think or smile or even cry. Do we really want to hinder the child with worrying about the mechanics of writing?

Other educators demand concise, correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. They are willing to spend hours of their own time circling mistakes with a red pen, writing in the margins hints and words of advice that few students even read.

Who Is Right?

Most people try to find middle ground: students need to be held responsible for using the conventions of writing they have mastered. Regie Routman (2000) defines conventions as "the way we do things around here—spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, grammar—to render language clearly and precisely on the page." Conventions are essential to clear writing. Editing makes students' writing readable and understandable. A good writing teacher will know what to expect from each student and will hold a student accountable for *what he knows*. (What mini-lessons have you taught? Do you know if students *really* understood what was taught in these lessons?) For instance, if you've been working on appropriate punctuation and you notice several of your students left out quotation marks in their practice writing, then that's a good indication that they didn't "get it" and, therefore, need further instruction, or they simply need more time to review and fix their mistakes.

A good way to keep track of what students understand is to have everyone keep in the back of their writing folders an ongoing list of which skills they have mastered.

Below is an example of what a fifth grader's **Editing Checklist** might look like:

Editing Checklist: Things I Know

Skill		Date	Teacher's Initials
" "	quotation marks	9-22	RFO
;	semi-colon	10-2	RFO
-	hyphen	11-11	RFO

Before asking the student to go back and, for example, put all the quotation marks in the right places, check to see that the student *learned* what you *taught*. How is that student's memory? Is she a visual learner and did you *show* her how to determine where the quotation marks belong or just *tell* her? Check the student's learning, then check your teaching method, then re-teach, if necessary.

> Follow the face of a little girl who . . . writes a story rich in imagination and insight and is told her handwriting and spelling are atrocious, who asks for help and is told she should try harder herself before getting others to do her work for her. . . . (*Hallowell and Ratey 1994*)

Spelling is one of the first writing conventions we might evaluate when we pick up a writing piece composed by one of our young students. All too often their writing is filled with inventive spelling that we may or may not be able to decipher. Focusing initially on the child's spelling, however, takes away from our understanding of the meaning the student was trying to convey. REMEMBER to discuss the content of the writing first. Focus on the ideas, feelings, and clarity of the piece. Spelling is important, but the editing conference—and not the content conference—is a time to discuss spelling issues.

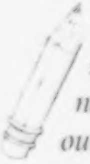
Poor spelling may be the result of weak phonological skills in which children neither discriminate individual sounds within words nor break longer words into syllables. Children with phonological deficits may need direct, individualized, or small-group instruction and phonetically based spelling programs well into middle school.

Other students may be plagued by a weakness in their memory, forgetting how to spell a given word while trying to remember what to write. For children with this weakness you might even see the same word spelled differently several times on any given page. These students will need help making connections between words that are similar in spelling patterns. For example, by knowing how to spell *bicycle* a student can spell *tricycle*.

As students get older, most schools will require they learn how to *keyboard*, which will allow them to access to computers' spelling and grammar-checking function. That's not to say that learning to spell and punctuate is not important, but students might feel more comfortable knowing help is available with some of the editing skills computers offer.

The Editing Conference

When a student has finished composing the piece of writing, having had several conferences with you, the teacher, and with her peers, it is then appropriate to hold an editing conference to help the student address spelling or structural mistakes to the best of that student's ability. It is *not helpful* for you to simply circle every mistake in sight.



"Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes."
—**Oscar Wilde**

Before an editing conference, you need to remind the student to check his skills list and make sure that he's done everything that he knows how to do. It's important to hold students accountable for *applying* what they know to their work. (A skills list consists of skills and strategies that you have taught that student and that you are sure he has learned. See pages 146, 149–151 for sample checklists and reproducibles.) If a student comes to a conference with careless spelling mistakes all over the page, before you hold a conference, send the student back to check his writing, fixing anything he can independently.

When a student comes to an editing conference prepared as well as he can be, it is then helpful to point out a few mistakes that may have been missed or to suggest resources that can help with punctuation or spelling, such as a Spellex word finder. (See pages 30 and 195 for possible student resources.)

This is also a chance for you to pick one or two things to teach that student. Look for evidence that the student has become aware of a particular skill or convention and then use this opportunity to help the student push ahead and refine his knowledge in that area. For instance, if a student has had some instruction about using conversation effectively in a piece of writing and has tried to use it—quotation marks everywhere—then this would be a perfect teaching opportunity! Start by praising his efforts, and then explain the correct procedure, using the student's writing in your explanation. Give the student a chance to learn from guided practice and then, once you feel confident that he has a good grasp on using the convention, direct him to go through the rest of the piece using his new knowledge.

For instance, Andy wrote the following as his lead in a story about sledding with his friends:

> "You want me to what? No WAY!" "Why not? Are you crazy? I'd break every bone in my body!"Chicken!"

Find a book with lots of conversation in it and *show* him how it's done. Then talk about *why* we need to start a new paragraph each time a different person speaks.

> "You want me to what? NO WAY!"
> "Why not?"
> "Are you crazy? I'd break every bone in my body!"
> "Chicken!"

You could point out that it is much easier for the reader to follow *who* is saying *what* the second time around. The student might now choose to add some identifying labels, such as *I replied, he shouted,* or *Jake asked.*

As the teacher, it is up to you to decide how far to push each student. Keep in mind, it is not essential that every finished piece be perfect. It is important, however, that the student make a good effort to use what he knows and that he have an opportunity to learn something new with each piece that he writes. An editing conference is the time to make sure that these two things have happened for that student.

Punctuation and Capitalization

Five Finger Editing

Instruct your students to use their fingers to ask themselves five very important questions.

Did I use a capital to begin my sentence?

Did I use capitals on names?

Did I put spaces between my words?

Did I use a period, question mark, or exclamation point to end my sentence?

Did I check my spelling?

COPS and the Neat Sheet

Let the COPS check your work!

Capitalization

Overall Appearance

Punctuation

Spelling

Name: ______________________________

Student Editing Checklist

When you are certain that your message is clear, including making sure all the necessary detail and description are included, it is time to turn your attention to editing for spelling, punctuation, and the other conventions of the written language. Once you have done all you can do on your own, you may use any resources available to you to fix your errors. Make sure you have checked all boxes before you turn in your finished draft.

☐ Have I corrected all of the circled misspelled words?

☐ Does every sentence begin with a capital letter?

☐ Have I correctly used all ending punctuation? **(. ? !)**

☐ Have I used quotation marks in any conversation I've written? **("   ")**

☐ Have I written complete sentences?

☐ Is my piece in paragraph form?

☐ Do I have an appropriate title for the piece?

Name: ____________________

Self-Evaluation Checklist Samples

Students: Fill these out and then attach them to your latest draft for your review.

Our Revising Checklist

Rate the quality of your piece of writing by checking the appropriate box below.

Does my writing . . .	**Great**	**Good**	**OK**	**Missing**
Seem interesting or exciting?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Show my true feelings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Include enough details?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tell the reader enough about the characters in the story?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Describe the background or setting?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Our Editing Checklist

Circle the conventions you have used in this piece.

I have included . . .

Punctuation	.	?	!	" "
Capital Letters	I	Beginning of a sentence	Proper nouns	
Accurate Spelling	I've checked it.	Not yet		

Publishing and Sharing

Publishing student work is essential in an excellent writing program. It sends a clear message to our students that says, "Your work counts! It is important enough to type and illustrate and share with a real audience!" Of course, illustrations are not a part of every publishing project, but *putting in more effort* and detail in order to make a book, letter, play, or poem presentable and effective is!

Many students who have displayed an aversion to writing will suddenly become more motivated to write when they know there is a real purpose for working so hard. The idea of publishing a piece of their writing for their parents or other students to read, to hold a poetry reading in front of other classes, or to feature an article in the school newspaper is usually enough to entice them to do their best. Writing just for the teacher's eyes isn't enough for students who struggle with the writing process. It's too hard or too meaningless.

"I always tell people that I became a writer not because I went to school but because my mother took me to the library. I wanted to become a writer so I could see my name in the card catalog."

—**Sandra Cisneros**

Real Books Get Published

It's funny how young children can make us stop and think about our own philosophies and being true to ourselves. Today I was working with Shannon and Noah. As I introduced our book, I explained that this book was published by first grade children who lived in Canada. "Wouldn't it be fun to publish a book someday?" I asked.

These two children looked at me so intently. Noah remarked very quietly, "But Mrs. Lesure, we have published our own books, two of them." I could see by their expressions that my seemingly innocent comment had truly disturbed them.

After a moment's pause, Shannon "reminded me" that just last year I had worked with the whole class to create two big books. They told me details of our work together. At year's end, one book stayed in the first grade classroom for incoming first graders to read. The other moved up to second grade with the class so they could read and reread it.

It was so heartwarming that these students placed such a high value on the books we had written. That, in theory, is always my goal. Mixed with that were feelings of regret that I had not been able to see the value and pride of their accomplishment.

Publishing and Sharing

Storybooks

Most students, of all ages, love to have their story published in the form of a book. There are countless ways to accomplish this. Here are some suggestions:

- **Parent Publishing Center:** Many schools have a parent publishing center where students can bring their finished story to have it typed and possibly made into a book. Binding machines are a quick and easy way to do this, after which students can illustrate or decorate the cover.

- **Student Publishing Center:** Some teachers prefer to have students sew the pages into the book cover, which might be covered in contact paper or wallpaper. Your own imagination will guide you in this matter.

Authors' Tea

Once your students each have a published book, it is fun to hold an Authors' Tea. The students make invitations to send out to family members and friends in the school. (You might need to limit the number of people each child invites!) Ask parents to bring food such as a plate of cookies, cheese and crackers, cut-up fruit, etc. On the day of the Tea, the students formally present their finished pieces of writing. Some teachers use a podium and a microphone, but you will have to decide what *you* can do, depending on what is available in your school. The idea is to honor your students and celebrate their accomplishments!

You're Invited!
Refreshments will be served!
Authors' Tea
Authors:
Mary M.
James R.
Molly D.

Students can design the front cover.

Class Anthology

Publish a collection of your students' writing. The pieces are usually all on the same topic or of the same genre. You could put together a group of book reviews, winter poems, pet stories, most important moments, family adventures, favorite recipes—you name it! There is *no limit* to the interesting and fun anthologies your class could publish!

Frames

When student writing is no more than one page (either typed or hand written), a nice way to publish it is to have the student create a *frame* in which to place the work. Leave a two-inch margin around the paper's edge and have the student draw a pattern of illustrations all the way around, *framing* the writing with his own artwork!

Plays

Most students love to present their stories in the form of a play. The author acts as the director. Whether or not you ask students to actually write the story in play form is up to you. It is usually possible for them to change a story into a play by writing out the entire dialogue. Remember that your goal would be for the students to enjoy their own story, feel pride in their work, and effectively communicate their ideas to other people.

Children's Magazines

There are many magazines, including those listed on page 156, that accept student writing for publication. The Internet is also a good source for locating other publications.

School/Classroom Newspaper

If your school doesn't have an avenue for publishing your students' writing so that the wider community can read it, try starting your own class newspaper or magazine! It takes time, but computers have made it easy to publish professional-looking publications. You'll be *thrilled* at how enthusiastic your students are when working on this project. Assign roles and jobs to your students and watch them practically run the publication by themselves!

These ideas are just a sampling of the incredible variety of ways to publish, share, and display your students' writing. For more ideas, refer to the professional bibliography on page 205.

Children's Magazines

Creative Kids (ages 8–14)
P.O. Box 8813
Waco, TX 76714-8813
1-800-998-2208
Fax: 1-800-240-0333
E-mail: Creative-Kids@prufrock.com

Cricket Magazine (ages 9–14)
Submissions:
315 5th St., P.O. Box 300
Peru, IL 61354

Highlights for Children
(ages 2–12)
Submissions:
803 Church St.
Honesdale, PA 18431

Kids City
Contact Kids
Submissions:
Children's Television Workshop
One Lincoln Plaza
New York, NY 10023

Odyssey (Space Exploration/
Astronomy for ages 8–14)
30 Grove Street
Peterborough, NH 03458
http://cobblestonepub.com

Stone Soup:
The Magazine by Young Writers and Artists
(ages 6–14)
P.O. Box 83
Santa Cruz, CA 95063

SECTION III

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Is It copying?

Kelly looked at me apologetically when it was her turn to share her writing. "This is going to sound sort of familiar. I'm writing the story from each character's own point of view, like the book I'm reading, A View From Saturday, and at the same time it's in journal form, like Absolutely Normal Chaos. I hope that's okay. I just really liked both styles and wanted to see if I could blend them together in one piece. Here goes! When I'm done reading, I'd like you to tell me whether or not you think it's an effective way to get my ideas and feelings across to people."

When she had finished reading her piece we gave her some feedback. The feeling seemed to be that the style was working very well for Kelly. I asked why she was hesitant about trying this new genre. "Well . . . isn't that copying? I mean, it's not really an original idea. It's just two ideas put together."

I was so glad that Kelly had opened up a new and important area of discussion. How do people come to have their own style of writing? Where does our voice come from and how do we decide the best way to express it?

The Reading-Writing Connection

It is important to teach reading and writing together, but as teachers we sometimes discuss these two topics as though they are totally separate from one another and need to be dealt with at two different times during our busy class schedule. Donald Graves, however, recommends that we "try to combine the reading-writing time into one block . . . The processes have too much in common to waste time this way." We read what has been written and we write in order to share our ideas and thoughts. After all, "Writing is the making of reading" (1994).

STUDENT GEM

"It was a hot and balmy night, just about 5:30 p.m. I was outside swinging on a vine from the big mahogonay (sic) tree in front of my porch steps."

—Julie, Grade 6

Moments like the one described in the journal entry above are crucial for writing teachers because they provide opportunities to explore options and new ideas with our students. After such a conference, the next step would be for the teacher to point out how writers are able to learn different writing styles by reading books, poems, and articles that may (or may not) become models. After reading mysteries, biographies, poetry, legends, and other genres, students can practice writing those types of stories, eventually developing their own style.

Reading different genres and experiencing a variety of voices and styles by different authors provides models for young writers. Students will observe print conventions, such as how and when to punctuate sentences or use capital letters and the many ways to construct a sentence, then experiment and perhaps include something new in their next piece of writing. For some writers, actually *seeing* the structure of our language in print enables them to learn how this system works and, therefore, to communicate effectively in writing.

Students who read a wide variety of good literature are immediately exposed to the beauty and mystery of our language. We even recommend you read to them . . . even if they *are* sixth graders. Through your voice students will hear descriptions, interesting vocabulary, and intriguing conversations that will serve as models when it comes time for them to write their own pieces.

Reading Skills ≠ Writing Skills: They Are Different Processes

> *"Reading and writing are similar in many aspects but differ in patterns of cognitive behaviors across processes and in learner approaches during meaning making."*
>
> —Dahl and Farnan 1998

Although reading and writing are closely linked, it is important to recognize that they are not the reverse process of one another. They are different processes in the brain, but each can aid and enrich the development of the other.

While reading to your class, it is important to discuss *why* an author chose the words he did and how he got his ideas and feelings across to his audience. Eventually these insights become automatic for many of the students who consider themselves authors. The student who *is* a writer views other people's writing differently than would a nonwriter—he notices good qualities that appear in another author's writing, but can also be more critical when an author's choice of words doesn't reach his own standards! After one class finished reading *Charlotte's Web* together, a third grade student declared, "E.B. White should have called this book *Spiders Might Surprise You* in order to add suspense to the story right away! It's more fun to keep people guessing. That's what I'm doing in my story!"

Teachers have noticed that students who write with an authentic purpose for a real audience become aware of good writing in all areas, not just in literature. They critique magazine articles and pen pal letters. They want their reading response journal entry to be interesting and clear, perhaps rewriting and changing a section before giving it to their partner or teacher to read. The importance of good writing permeates your entire classroom! The students begin to see connections between writing and all areas of learning—it is no longer just part of the teacher's agenda, but a way for students to discover what they know and how they think. They can record information and feelings and communicate ideas to others. Writing becomes a very powerful process in students' learning.

The following pages include ideas on how to work writing into all areas of the curriculum. Just remember that students should follow the same process and have the same expectations for good writing, no matter what genre they work in.

Math

Journal: Students keep a step-by-step record of how they arrive at solutions to problems—what was their thought process? Why did they choose this particular step? This is no easy task, but students who can explore their own thinking will be much better able to repeat successful strategies with future math problems than students who consider their solution just a *lucky* guess. And for students who struggle with writing, discussing with them *how* they think (otherwise known as metacognition) will help them clarify and understand the process.

Below is a sample of leading questions for students to try to answer in their math journals. We suggest you or the students type them up or write them in list form and keep them at the back of the students' journals so students can refer to them any time.

- Were you correct right away or did you try several different strategies before getting to the right one? If so, what were they?
- Did you *form a picture* of the solution in your head before you actually performed the operation or used a formula?
- Would using simple numbers in the same problem have helped? Why?
- Did you discuss this problem with anyone else? Was that conversation helpful? Why or why not?
- Did you doodle or draw a diagram to help you better understand the question being asked? Was that helpful? Why or why not?

Reading

Response Journals: Students can organize these journals in a variety of ways, but the purpose is for writers to first *investigate* their thoughts and feelings, in writing, about a reading passage, making any possible links with other areas of their life. Then, a teacher or a parent needs to *respond* to those thoughts, in writing, usually in the same journal and right under the student's entry. This written dialogue provides thoughtful feedback and it gives guidance and ideas about ways to extend a student's thinking.

Book Extensions: Ask students to extend a book one more chapter or rewrite an entire section! Keep in mind that not all books lend themselves to further extensions; they have such a great conclusion that it would be very difficult to add to it. In this situation the students could use their imaginations, combined with their knowledge and feelings about the book, to create a new, often fascinating, chapter or section anywhere in the story. This activity allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the events and characters.

Character Journal: After reading a book, students choose a main character and write personal journal entries from that person's point of view. The topics can either revolve around issues in the book, or they can be related to actual problems the student is working to resolve in his own life. In both cases, the student will need to know what makes that character "tick."

Character Sketch: In order for students to learn how to write fictional pieces well, it is imperative they learn how to develop their characters. They need to know *what* their characters are like and *how* and *why* they react to things. In short, the author needs to have a good sense of what motivates the character to act and feel the way he does.

An effective method by which to assist your writers with this exercise is to read a particular section from a book that reveals important information about a character. You might use a passage describing Harry Potter, the lead character in J.K. Rowling's best-seller *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, or a paragraph describing the boy in E.B. White's *Trumpet of the Swan*.

If you choose to read a descriptive passage from *Harry Potter*, ask the class what they now know about Harry: his appearance, where he lives, what is home life is like, or how he feels about his cousin Dudley. Ask students to predict how Harry feels about his Aunt Petunia. Why do they think he feels that way? Then you can play a question/answer game with the class. You pretend to be the character and they ask you questions.

The following is a sample made-up dialogue between the "character" (Harry Potter, in this case) and the class:

Class: *"How old are you?"*
Harry Potter: "I'm 11 years old."

"Do you remember your parents?"
"No. I wish I could, but I was only a baby when they died."

"Do you like living with your cousin and his parents?"
"I tolerate it because I have no choice. They are very thoughtless, rude people who never show an ounce of kindness toward me."

"Do you have any special talents?"
"Only that I seem to be able to communicate with snakes. I don't really understand it myself."

The game can be played in reverse when the student has written a fictional piece. She can have you or a group of students read her description of a character and then ask questions about what the character feels or knows. This will help the student-author to develop her understanding of the character, which in turn will make her writing become fuller and richer.

If a student is struggling with finding the right words to use to adequately describe his character, brainstorm lists of good descriptors with a group of students and hang the chart on the wall in the Author's Corner as a reference. This would be particularly helpful to students who have difficulty with the ideas and language needed to express their thoughts.

Another strategy you can use to help students with language difficulties is to have them practice their character description by describing a real friend or sibling before attempting to describe a character in a story. By starting with someone they know, students do not have to begin from scratch. Remember that developing characters in a fictional piece of writing is considered a difficult task for any author to do. Most students in the intermediate grades will need lots of practice in order to develop this skill.

Science and Social Studies

Science Journal: This journal is a student's written record of his thoughts and reflections about science experiments and observation.

Social Studies Journal: This journal provides a place for students to think about and write down their thoughts about the topics they discuss and read about during social studies.

Research Projects/Papers: Students in grades three through six need to learn a variety of skills when studying science and social studies. Students should learn how to:

- interview people
- take notes
- develop an outline
- use webs and other graphic organizers (see pages 79–88)
- locate information on the Internet
- use reference materials from the library (atlas, encyclopedia, thesaurus, etc.)
- develop a step-by-step plan for the project

Learning to record and organize factual information is very difficult for most students, especially for children with weaknesses in the areas of memory, attention, and organization. An intelligent child with an intense interest in a particular content area may become very frustrated because he can't communicate and inform others about his knowledge. This is often a time when a child who has struggled with other assignments wants to shine. "*I know something about RAIN FORESTS!*" Jack wants to shout, but then he has no idea which way to turn or where to start. (See a sample of Jack's writing on page 184.) This student will need the support of an advance organizer such as "Key Ideas" (see page 84) and possibly a web (see page 79). He could also use a tape recorder or enlist the help of a peer scribe to record his information during the first stages of the report.

Careful guidance through the first few report assignments is critical for a student like Jack. The expectations need to be crystal clear and he needs to see examples of good finished products so he knows how high to aim. Remember that Jack, or any student with similar issues, needs to treat this research project as he would any piece of writing. He needs to share it, listen to feedback from his audience, experiment with choosing words, revising and editing before it becomes a finished product.

Music and Art

Your students can use writing to express their thoughts about music and visual arts. Students might choose to write:

- a play
- the lyrics to songs
- a poem to accompany a painting or sculpture
- lists of favorite songs, plays, musicals, or painters
- a biography of a famous musician or artist

It is valuable for children of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to see the myriad of ways in which we use written expression. To help bring this realization to light, keep an ongoing list with your students of the various ways they use writing in their work. Have students interview their parents or others in the community for their ideas, too. Keep adding to the list throughout the year—You'll be amazed at how long your list will grow! (See pages 39–40 for activities on listing.)

Language Arts: Making Connections Through Journal Writing

As in other curriculum areas, using journal writing in the language arts provides many opportunities for students to develop as writers. This type of writing is a way for them to make connections in all areas of the curriculum—connections between their own ideas, past and present, or links between the student's prior knowledge and some newly acquired information; connections between the thoughts of the student and those of a friend, parent, or teacher. This exercise allows students to compare ideas and feelings about a chosen topic or a passage in a book.

There are actually many different types of journals, each with a slightly different focus. Some are described under their content area heading above, but a few are difficult to delegate to only one area of study. These are listed below. Remember that they are just sample ideas of things that have worked with students in the past. This is not a complete list. In fact, you and your students will most likely be able to add to the list as you experiment and become more comfortable with journals!

Idea Journal: In idea journals, students can include notes on various topics, written in short phrases or in a list. This is particularly helpful for students who find it difficult to remember information they find interesting or need for their writing. Jotting down quick notes is an effective way to capture important or creative ideas before they vanish. (Some students may need to use a tape recorder for this purpose.)

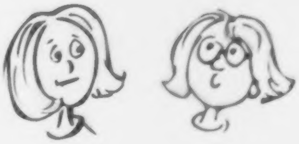
Personal Journal: A personal journal is just that—personal. This journal is considered a diary and does not ever have to be shared. The student needs the privacy in order to feel safe enough to explore deep feelings or new ideas. By giving them the choice to share or keep the writing private also strengthens the student's emerging sense of *ownership* and *control*—two very important feelings for an author to possess.

Writer's Observations Journal: This type of journal allows students to write down random thoughts and observations in many settings and at various times throughout the day (not just in school). These ideas automatically become possible sources of information for pieces the student may be writing in school or at home. (Your students may recognize this activity as the type of journal kept by Harriet in *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh. This is a good opportunity to point out the reading-writing connection!) The writer's observation journal is great for students with difficulties in the area of ideation.

Never underestimate the power of discovery. It is often through journal entries that students of all ability levels can discover what they know and feel, therefore leading to self-discovery; they confirm what they've recently learned or question what they've thought in the past. People often find out how powerful writing can be through the use of their journal, and it is a good venue through which the reluctant writer, one who has an aversion to writing, can overcome some of his difficulties. This is especially true for the student who feels disconnected from his writing.

SECTION IV

PROBLEM SITUATIONS (WITH TEACHING STRATEGIES THAT CAN HELP!)



As teachers we always strive to look at each of our student's needs. We carefully assess so we know where our students fall on the learning continuum—what do they understand? In what areas do they need more instruction? We develop goals and we look at the steps we must take to ensure that our students meet these goals. We plan our lessons to provide quality content and skills instruction in each curriculum area, especially those in which students struggle. Yet, for many, our teaching does not ensure they will learn, and therefore, some students make little progress.

Why some students struggle is complicated. As such, primary-grade teachers must account for students' early life experiences and family educational background, and it is our responsibility to take these early learners from where they are on the first day of school and move them along a continuum, constantly building the skills they need to master. By the third or fourth grade, however, a shift seems to occur, and rather than focus on what students are *able* to do, we begin to look at what students *cannot* do. Teachers will note that:

- Jimmy cannot write all the letters of the alphabet without models and, because most third graders no longer need models, there is no longer an alphabet strip attached to his desk.
- Sally cannot write a complete sentence.
- Mickey cannot keep letters evenly sized or spaced.

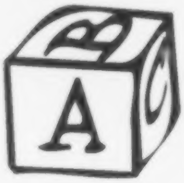
But these students should have learned these important skills already, right? Just because we teach these skills does not mean each student will master them, and it is easy to assume that *why* a particular student has not mastered one or more skills is because there is a problem with that student and *not* with the instruction.

This is a common misconception, and it is imperative educators recognize the difference between what we teach and what students learn. Perhaps the first and easiest way to do this is to acknowledge that each student learns differently—some are more visual, while others are more verbal. Some are kinesthetic learners, while others respond better to written instruction. Although at first these variations may seem overwhelming, as teachers we need to ask ourselves, "What do we need to do to ensure that children learn to write?"

In this section we have included common problems associated with student-writers in grades three through six. You will find writing samples, many of which will look like those of your struggling writers. We have provided:

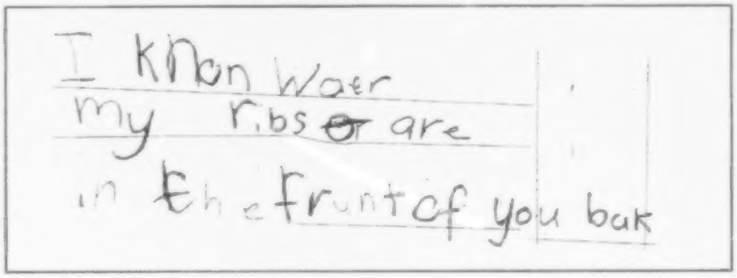
- **Problem-situation** scenarios and student samples.
- **Analysis** of each problem situation.
- **Questions** to ask yourself about the student's writing.
- **Instructional strategies** and **modifications** to try with your struggling writers (you can try these strategies with your entire class). Instructional strategies are specific methods of instruction, while modifications refer to more subtle changes within the regular classroom program.
- **Digging Deeper**, which includes specific information meant to provide you with a working understanding of the areas of difficulty that impact students' ability to write.

Language: Sounds in Words



Problem:

Teacher: "This student's writing never makes sense. The words are all mixed up, spelling is awful, and her sentences aren't logical. It's hard for me to translate what she's trying to say."



I Knon Waer
my ribs ~~or~~ are
in the frunt of you bak

I know waer my ribs ~~or~~ are in the frunt of you bak.

Translation:
I know where my ribs are. (They are) in the front of your back.

Analysis:

This sample was written by Sharon, a fourth grader, during a science unit on bones, and it gives good insight into her language skills. Spelling attempts to be phonetic, showing poor phonological understanding. *Where* is now two syllables (*wa/er*). There is confusion between *are* and *or* and between *you* and *your*. Also, notice the discrepancy between "my ribs" and "your back." The student is unable to state that ribs are in the chest or the front of the body. Sentences are incomplete.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Does the student use vocabulary appropriate to her age?
- Does the student overuse certain words, especially the high-frequency words such as *and*, *thing*, and *said*?
- Are ideas simplified with little elaboration?
- Are sentences short and concrete?
- Does the child write slowly? (Remember, it can be tedious for some students to get their thoughts down on paper.)
- How is her reading? Does she like to read? Does she have good comprehension?
- Can this student tell you a story from beginning to middle to end?

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If you have answered yes to several of these questions, you may be working with a student who has phonological awareness, word retrieval, and language processing issues.

Strategies to Try:

- Look through *Help Me Learn to Write* for instructional strategies and activities marked with the A icon.
- **Wordplay** can be a critical teaching tool for children with phonological deficits. Alliteration exercises, work with homonyms, rhymes, and onomatopoeia are language tools teachers should teach directly. We recommend you teach sounds through a game format. You (and your students) will find this venue more enjoyable and more effective than using these activities as remediation. (See pages 124–134.)
- **Alphabet Books** or other stories that "play with sounds" are fun while also being instructive. There exists a variety of wonderful books for children of all ages.

> The content of many alphabet books extends far beyond the rudimentary functions of letter identification, letter-sound correspondence, and object identification traditionally associated with these works. Varying degrees of content complexity help make alphabet books usable with a wide range of age groups. . . . The resourceful teacher would be wise to consider alphabet books as important and valuable instructional tools.
>
> —*Chaney 1993*

ABC: Egyptian Art from the Brooklyn Museum, F.C. Mayers, 1988
Abracadabra to Zigzag, N. Lecourt, 1991
Alphabet Out Loud, R. Bragg, 1991
Animalia, G. Base, 1986
Antics! An Alphabetical Anthology, C. Hepworth, 1992
Architects Make Zigzags: Looking at Architecture from A to Z, D. Maddex, 1986
The A-to-Z Book of Cars, A. Royston and T. Pastor, 1991
Cowboy Alphabet, J. Rice, 1990
Eight Hands Round: A Patchwork Alphabet, A. Paul, 1991
The Folks in the Valley: A Pennsylvania Dutch ABC, J. Aylesworth, 1992
Geography from A to Z: A Picture Glossary, J. Knowlton, 1988
Illuminations, J. Hunt, 1989
The Russian ABC, F.C. Mayers, 1992
A Yellowstone ABC, C. Martin, 1992
The Z was Zapped, C. VanAllsburg, 1987

- Your **direct instruction** of **root words, suffixes, and prefixes** can be extremely helpful for students with language difficulties who may not intuitively understand word derivations. Most students enjoy learning how and why words were originally formed and know they have changed over the centuries. (See page 130.)
- Devote significant time to the **drafting** and **conferencing stages** of the writing process. (See page 89.)
- Students with phonological deficits may need **individualized or small-group instruction** related to sounds in words. Phonetically based spelling programs are appropriate in combination with direct instruction in discriminating different sounds. For example, help children learn that *past* without the *s* is *pat*. Help them learn to switch sounds by a technique called "chaining." For example, *beast* → *beat* → *bet* → *let* → *tell* → *ten*, and so on. (See pages 131–133.)
- **Scribe** for students a list of their key words for a piece of writing in progress.

Classroom Modifications:

- **Difficulties with spelling** may reflect a phonological weakness/ language difficulty, the inability to visualize word patterns, or the inability to note individual parts within the whole of a word. Help students identify their language weakness, then set up a study plan.
- **Word Walls** will provide your students with access to the correct spelling of commonly used high-frequency words and can include specialized units of study words.

To Consider:

As a teacher you should also consider that this student may have a memory weakness that inhibits her recall of spelling and/or letter formations, what was already written, and what she originally planned to write. (See Digging Deeper into Memory, page 186.)

Digging Deeper

Digging Deeper into Language: Sounds in Words

Weak language skills can have a marked impact on a child's ability to write individual sounds, words, sentences, and paragraphs, discriminate order, and blend or segment sounds in words. Reading and writing for all children begins with phonological awareness—the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate individual sounds within the spoken word. Students must have a strong understanding of spoken language before they can understand written language. Children with difficulties in phonological processing may not be able to discriminate key words. They may, in fact, use the wrong words.

What Word Is It?

It was a double trouble day—Friday and Halloween. Amelia, a 4th Grader, simply could not focus. I decided we needed a break and pulled out my much-loved copy of The 13 Nights of Halloween by Rebecca Dickinson. We settled down to read together. Amelia started:

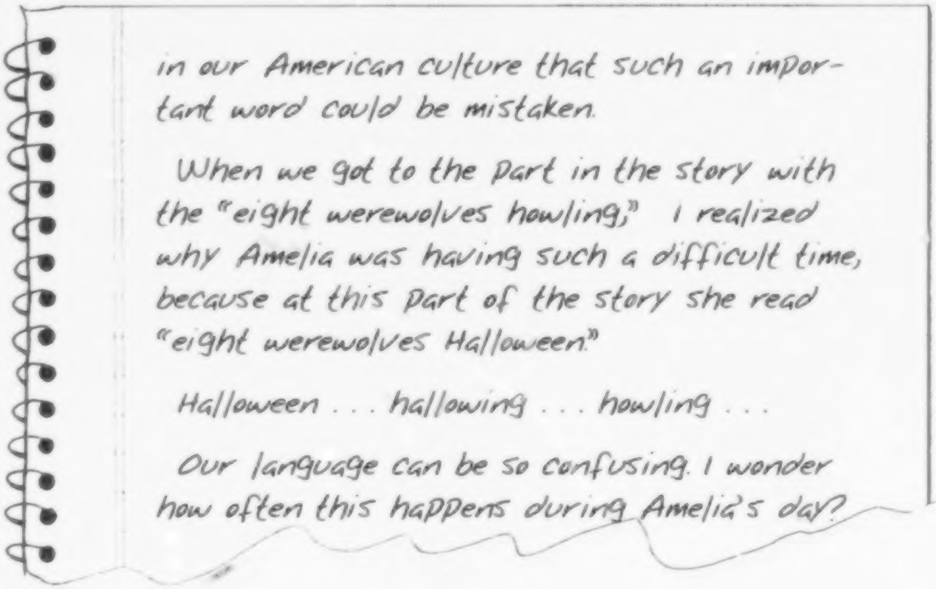
"On the first night of Halloween my goblin gave to me . . ."

The story continues, "On the second night of Halloween . . ."

Amelia's voice registered. Did I hear her say "hallowing" instead of Halloween?

Amelia continued reading: "On the third night of Halloween." I was now positive—Amelia did say hallowing for Halloween. We stopped, looked carefully at the word, then continued.

Amelia had a hard time saying the word correctly. Guess it was well ingrained. Surprising



in our American culture that such an important word could be mistaken.

When we got to the part in the story with the "eight werewolves howling," I realized why Amelia was having such a difficult time, because at this part of the story she read "eight werewolves Halloween."

Halloween . . . hallowing . . . howling . . .

Our language can be so confusing. I wonder how often this happens during Amelia's day?

Consider those students in your class who, like Amelia, have misused words that are easily confused with similar-sounding words. Below are some examples:

then - than
firm - fern
win - when
there - fare
kiddie - kitty
winner - winter
deaf - death
scrabble - scramble
accept - except
subscription - prescription

And what about those students who frequently mispronounce common, everyday words such as:

aminals - animals
probly - probably
bisghetti - spaghetti

acrost - across
hangaber - hamburger
hopsital - hospital

While it may at first seem cute when children use such word slurs, if they persist in using these pronunciations, then the word's actual meaning is lost. The teacher should consider that these students may, in fact, have a language difficulty.

Phonological awareness is not the only skill required for effective reading and writing, but it is most assuredly a necessary skill that some students will lack. In these students you will likely note that:

- they have trouble producing rhymes and breaking words into syllables. In fact, they may confuse syllable order in words
- their decoding skills are delayed
- spelling is weak
- words often contain letter insertions (*objetck/object*) and/or omissions (*hunerd/hundred*)

Students with phonological awareness issues may also:

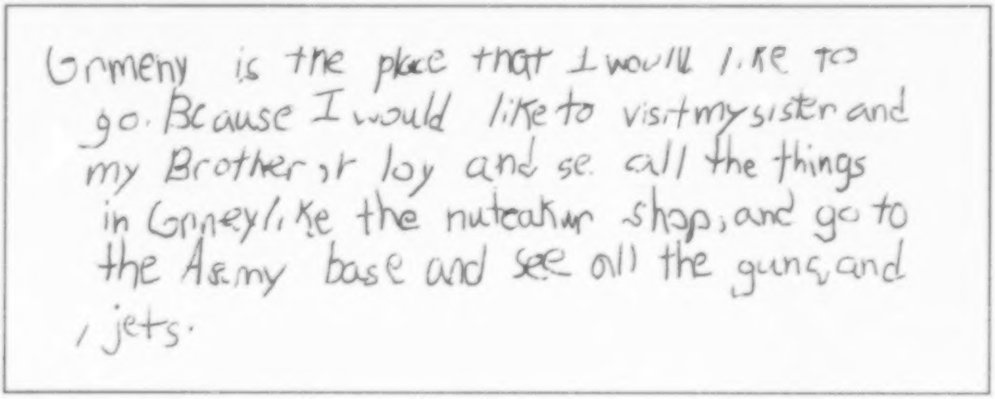
- have difficulty with rapid-naming tasks that require them to retrieve quickly specific words
- find it difficult to follow directions
- demonstrate poor recall of lengthy discussion or dialogue
- have difficulties discriminating key words
- use the wrong words

Fortunately, many students are able to work through these difficulties with direct and explicit instruction.

Language: Ideation

Problem:

Teacher: "During the statewide sixth grade testing, one student just sat and looked at the writing prompt. He sat and sat and sat. I quietly talked with him in order to help him generate some ideas, but he still seemed unable to write more than a few words. After the writing session was over, he had produced very little. How can I help those writers who don't seem to have any ideas?"



Grmeny is the place that I woull like to
go. Bcause I would like to visit my sister and
my Brother ,r loy and se all the things
in Grney like the nutcakur shop, and go to
the Army base and see all the guns, and
, jets.

Analysis:

This sample, written by a sixth grader, is terse, with little elaboration. He gives some reasons for his interest in Germany, but he does not explain *why* his siblings are there or give details about specific sites. He has written only two sentences.

Questions to Ask:

- Does the student have a topic that is simply too broad to begin writing about?
- Is this student generally very quiet, or does the student have a lot to say but little to write?
- Does the student talk a lot but actually say very little? Is speech fluent or halting and labored?
- Does the student write slowly? (It can be tedious for some students to get their ideas down on paper.)

- Can this student tell you a story from beginning to middle to end?
- What is the student's reading ability?
- Does the student use age-appropriate vocabulary?
- Does the student overuse certain words, especially high-frequency words such as *and, thing, said*?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, then you are most likely working with a student whose language production is weak. To be able to write and communicate well, students must be able to develop ideas and responses and use language effectively by developing ideas and rendering responses.

Strategies to Try:

- Look through *Help Me Learn to Write* for instructional strategies and activities marked with the 💡 icon.
- Getting started is often the most difficult part of writing. Help students **get ideas** from their own lives—something that is important to them, an experience or event that evokes strong feelings and emotions. (See pages 40 and 48.)
- Students often have wonderful ideas for writing, but their topics may be too broad, which can result in a writing piece of poor quality. Provide direct guidance on how to **narrow down their topics**. For example, instead of writing about "My Dog," encourage students to write about a more specific incident, such as, "The Day My Dog Caught the Porcupine!"
- Tap into students' prior background knowledge through teacher-directed **activities**, and help students learn to question, reflect, and draw on previous life experience, factual information, and memories for use in their writing.

Classroom Modifications:

- Teachers can help students with poor ideation by giving them **special guidelines** to follow, including, among other things, specific topics, character sketches, and cause-and-effect scenarios. (See pages 72, 161–163.)
- **Interactive writing** can model for students how teachers and classmates "think" when developing ideas for writing. This process is actually a shared writing time in which students and their

teacher contribute to the development and recording of ideas in the composition.

To Consider:

- Students with poor short-term memory may be able to develop ideas, but not retain them long enough to get them down on paper. (See Digging Deeper into Memory, page 186.)
- The physical act of writing may impede the progress of writing for some students. (See Digging Deeper into Motor Skills, page 191.)
- Students may feel they have nothing to share and demonstrate a negative attitude toward writing. (See Digging Deeper into Social Issues and Aversion, page 196.)

Digging Deeper into Language: Ideation

Do you know the student who always says, "Ummmm . . ." or, "That thing. . . . You know"? Many children who have trouble using words correctly or who speak hesitantly may, in fact, be struggling with a word-retrieval problem. These children often have the word on the "tip of the tongue." Under pressure to use words quickly and fluently, they resort to using the same words over and over again. Then there are those students who tell you a lengthy story, expressing in a hundred words what they could have said in five. Yet, when you ask them to clarify or "get to the point," they cannot. These may be the very same students who arrive home and tell their parents they did "nothing" in school.

Many students with language problems have difficulty expressing themselves orally, and when they are asked to write, the problem is compounded.

Just as some children have trouble identifying sounds in words or new vocabulary, others have trouble with ideation, the "generation of thoughts" (Levine 1994). These students may have difficulty:

- choosing, developing, and elaborating on a topic
- expanding on their ideas or including prior background knowledge (instead, they may demonstrate terse and abbreviated writing)
- utilizing their creative imaginative ideas

Writers with language difficulties may write slowly, making the process tedious and frustrating. Writing is, after all, a language-based activity. Despite this, we still need our students to write and to write well. Written expression may, in fact, help students learn how to elaborate.

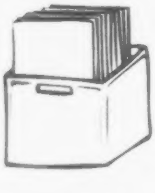
Students who have language issues will need your help when:

- brainstorming topics
- listing key words
- developing and expanding ideas
- thinking about what they saw, how they felt, what they heard and smelled

Provide these students with concrete tasks ("free-writes" will be very difficult for these children), and be sure they are writing about topics *they* care about.

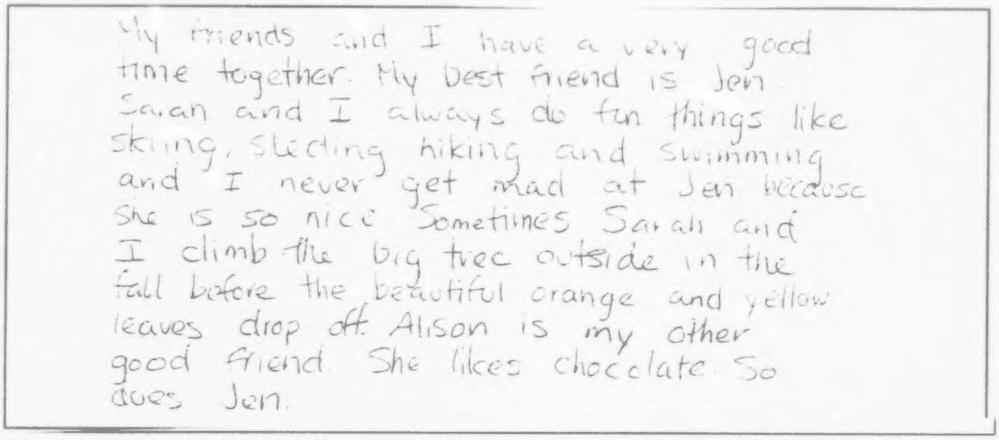
Weak language skills can impact students' ability to use and understand the *social conventions* of language, and as a result they may not understand the word we use in social situations. For example, if you were to ask these students to give you a hand, they might actually try to shake hands rather than help. Such subtleties in our language may elude them.

Organization



Problem:

Teacher: "This student has wonderful insights and ideas, but she's all over the place! Not only is it hard for me to follow her thinking pattern, but she also seems to frustrate *herself*, often giving up on a piece due to the confusion she's experiencing. How can I help her to structure her writing project so she can be successful and feel that great sense of accomplishment that comes with finishing a piece of work?"



My friends and I have a very good
time together. My best friend is Jen.
Sarah and I always do fun things like
skiing, sledding hiking and swimming
and I never get mad at Jen because
she is so nice. Sometimes Sarah and
I climb the big tree outside in the
fall before the beautiful orange and yellow
leaves drop off. Alison is my other
good friend. She likes chocolate. So
does Jen.

Analysis:

This sample was written by Mandy, a sixth grader who desperately wanted to be a good writer and to publish this story about her friends. She has included lots of details, but not in a logical sequence. Bringing in details about the tree when she did, for example, distracts from the description of her friends.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Does the student have an abundance of interesting, sometimes creative ideas that are not in any particular order? (Ideas may not even seem connected.)
- Does the student have various pieces of paper in her folder, many just partially written on? Does her work often "disappear," eventually resurfacing in a clothes pocket or at the back of her desk?

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- Are there several incomplete writing pieces in her folder that appear to have been abandoned?
- Does she switch her topic midstream, both as she talks and as she writes?
- Is her attention span short? Does she seem to switch her focus frequently?
- Do her writing pieces go on forever with no end in sight?
- Does she have trouble with the *concept of time*? Is she often late or unsure of the schedule?
- Is she able to judge how long something will take?
- Does she have trouble sequencing—what needs to happen first? next? last?
- Do transitions often come as a surprise to her? ("It's time for lunch already? I had no idea it was so late!")

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be working with a student who has difficulties organizing. She needs to learn some strategies to help her focus her attention and organize her writing.

Strategies to Try:

- Look through *Help Me Learn to Write* for instructional strategies and activities marked with the ↱ icon.

- Introduce your student to **graphic organizers** (see pages 79–88 for reproducibles). Help her to think about her whole plan for the piece she's writing, but then have her write it down so that she can *see it* in front of her. Let her know she does not have to remember everything she wants to include.

- Try teaching her to use the **cut-and-paste method** described on page 123.

- Show her how to **highlight each topic with a different color** and then group the colors to form cohesive paragraphs.

- Teach her to **pace herself** by prompting her to relax and just work on one thing at a time. (Students with organizational difficulties often try to keep too many things going at once, doing a little of *this*, leaving it, and then doing a little of *that*.)

- Instruct the student in how to make a **list of next steps** and help her to learn how to **prioritize** them. (*Which is the most important, most pressing thing on the list?* Do that first.) Make sure she uses the list regularly.

- Teach her to **reread** what she has written when she gets stuck or before she attempts to write more. **Subvocalizing** softly might help her focus and carefully listen to her own words. Have her check on only one or two things each time she rereads. (e.g., *"Are the events in the correct order?"* Or, *"Have I finished describing one character before going on to another, unrelated description?"* Or, *"Will someone reading this for the first time know what is going on?"*)

- Help her **develop a sense of time**. (*What does 10 minutes feel like?*) Use a timer or an alarm of some kind to alert her to the passing of a specified length of time.

Classroom Modifications:

- The more organization you put into your writing program, the easier it will be for the students who experience weakness in a particular area. Have a **clear system of folders** for works-in-progress and for finished pieces.

- Plan on giving students **enough time** at the end of the writing period to file their work away in the correct spot. Rushing the student for whom organizing is an issue is unfair.

- Remember the importance of giving students **a consistent block of time** for writing. Structure helps students to be organized.

- **Touch base with students** at the beginning of each class (see page 23). Discuss what needs to happen next, and write reminders (key words and phrases) on a sticky note for the student to refer to.

- **Minimize the number of distractions and interruptions** during writing time. Students who have difficulty focusing on their writing may find it very hard to get back into their writing after an interruption. If a student is busily putting pen to paper, even you should avoid talking to her at that moment.

- Make sure students have a **quiet area in which to work** (*not* right next to the door or beside the conference table)
- Alleviate the stress involved in wanting to **conference** with the teacher by implementing a fair system. Ideas include:
  - assigning numbers, like in the deli at the grocery store
  - assigning conference days (Sally, John, Garrett, Tyler, and Anna are on Monday; Kim, Amanda, Kelsey, Hunter, and Patrick are on Tuesday, etc.)
  - posting a sign-up sheet each day, carrying over the names of students who didn't get a turn the day before. (See page 32 for a reproducible sheet to use with your class.)

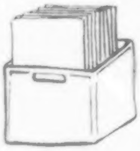
Each system has its advantages and shortcomings. Experiment to find out which way works best for you and your students. Just remember that it is important for each student to have a turn meeting with you. If a student is free from worrying about his turn, he will have more mental energy to put toward composing, revising, or editing!

To Consider:

An unorganized student may have difficulty *remembering* her plan or next step. (See Digging Deeper into Memory, page 186.)

Disorganization may result from a *lack of focus*. The student may have a deficit in *attention*. You may need to ask for a Special Education Evaluation of the student—one that would involve the child's pediatrician.

Digging Deeper into Organization



Organization, an aspect of executive function, is our ability to do such tasks as preview, predict, plan next steps, pace our activity, attend selectively, and self-monitor. There are several contributing factors to a student's state of disorganization, such as attention deficit disorder, but for other children, the issue is poor modeling and lack of structure at home and/or at school. As with most everything, moderation is key—it is important to be disciplined and organized, showing students how being organized can save them the time and energy to do other things, but it is equally important to be flexible. In an environment in which organization is either overemphasized or de-emphasized, students will have a difficult time finding a good middle ground.

> Structure refers to the set of external controls that one sets up to compensate for unreliable internal controls. . . . Setting up a system does *not* have to be boring; in fact, one can be quite creative in devising a workable structure. And once in place, the system will be calming and confidence-building. (*Hallowell and Ratey 1994*)

The task of organizing one's thoughts in writing is complex. Not only do students have to be able to interpret and act on assignments and directions, they must also be able to prioritize ideas and decide what is important and what needs attention first, in addition to organizing the main ideas and supporting details so their audience is able to make sense of their writing piece.

Students who lack organizational skills will find the following steps difficult when writing:

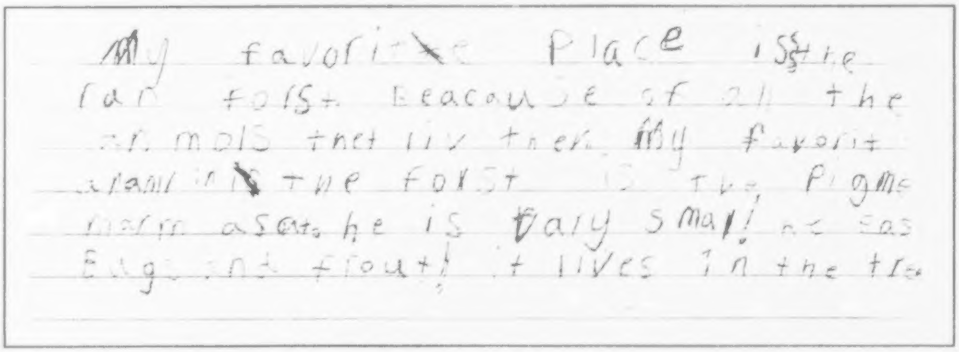
- planning and pacing
- organizing materials (spatial organization—knowing *what* they need, *where* it is, and *when* they'll need it)
- timing and sequencing (accurate use of the terms *first, next, last,* etc.)
- directing (mental direction—knowing which way to turn /what needs to happen next)

Help your students who face these difficulties recognize they need external support structures, and then patiently guide them toward the tools they will need to become better organized. You will be helping students to become not only more effective writers but also perhaps more effective people who are in better control of their time, possessions, and endeavors.

Memory

Problem:

Teacher: "How can I help this student who is very bright but who is such a weak writer? He can tell me lots of ideas to write about while we brainstorm, but then he loses track of his thoughts while he writes."



My favorite Place is the
ran forst Beacause of all the
animols thet liv then. My favorit
animal in the forst is the Pigme
marmaset. he is vary smal! he eas
Bugs and frout! it lives in the tre

Analysis:

Jack, an extremely intelligent and verbal third grader, wrote this passage on the rain forest. His reading skills are far above grade level. This is a boy who holds a wealth of information across a broad range of environmental subjects. Yet, Jack begins by writing about his favorite place and immediately moves to the favorite animal and how it lives. Sentences are incomplete. He seems to recall that fruit has a *u* in it, but does not notice he has spelled *frout*, a word he can easily read. His active working memory cannot keep everything "in mind."

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Does the student spell words correctly for spelling tests, then immediately forget them?
- Is this a student who knows all the editing rules, but neglects to use them in his writing?
- Does this child have many ideas when brainstorming, but then, when it comes to writing, uses only simplistic ideas?
- Does this student write neatly when copying and complete handwriting papers with ease? Are compositions less legible?

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- Do you note incomplete sentences?
- Did the original topic switch mid-composition?
- Can the student recall *what* ideas he planned to write about while thinking about *how* to spell each word?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you likely have a student whose memory banks are easily overloaded. The first four questions are related to students with long-term memory delays. The last few are related to short-term memory. All questions overlap to some degree.

Strategies to Try:

- Look through *Help Me Learn to Write* for instructional strategies and activities marked with the icon.
- Tap into prior background knowledge through **teacher-directed activities**. This can help students learn to question, reflect, and draw on previous life experiences, factual information, and memories, all of which they can use as fodder for their writing.
- Help students "link" new learning to old by **calling up previous background information** and **drawing associations** between old and new. In addition, help writers **learn new writing conventions** until they become automatic. Children with memory problems need time to consolidate new learning with sufficient practice and instruction.
- **Provide advance organizers and time to plan** prior to writing. Advance organizers come in many different forms, so students can choose the style they like best. Teach several organizing strategies, such as webbing and outlining, then allow students to decide what works best for them. (See pages 79–88.)
- **V-A-K-T**—Visual-Auditory-Kinesthetic-Tactile—is a multisensory-metacognitive strategy of instruction that can help your students learn to enhance memory by getting the information to and from their brains through the sensory channels.

Classroom Modifications:

- Expect that students with memory deficits will take longer to search for information in their memory banks and apply it to new learning. Be patient and give them the time they need for writing assignments and test taking.
- Students will benefit from group brainstorming sessions where the teacher, or another student, writes on overhead projector film or chart paper. This will help students with memory weaknesses to retain their thoughts, broaden vocabulary for those with language weaknesses, and relieve students with poor fine-motor skills.

To Consider:

- Difficulty in the area of phonological awareness may also impact the student's spelling. (See Digging Deeper into Language: Sounds in Words, page 172.)
- A weakness in motor skills would also impact a student's ability to write legibly. (See Digging Deeper into Motor Skills, page 191.)

Digging Deeper into Memory:

How Remembering May Be Interfering with Some Students' Thought Process

"Writing demands smoothly synchronized rapid retrieval memory," writes Dr. Mel Levine (1999), director of The Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Writers must be able to quickly and easily call up and visualize letter formations and word configurations, recall sound/symbol relationships and spelling rules, retrieve vocabulary and correct word usage, and rely on motor memory for letter production—all while simultaneously remembering what they are trying to write. Students who experience memory deficits, however, may have a very difficult time with rapid-recall activities, which can have a profound effect on their writing.

Long-Term Memory

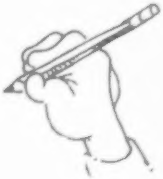
Have you read compositions in which the same word is spelled three different ways? This pattern may indicate a writer who has trouble accessing long-term memory, which normally enables writers to access prior background knowledge, writing conventions, and motor procedures quickly and accurately. Demands on long-term memory may cause brain overload and impair thinking. Long-term memory weaknesses present other challenges for students. They may not be able to access rules for punctuation and spelling. They may recognize the correct spelling for a word, but not be able to recall how to spell the very same word. These students need time to remember.

Short-Term Memory

Short-term memory is short, very short. Although short-term memory is said to hold "chunks" of thought for maybe 20 seconds, longer with rehearsal (Markowitz and Jensen 1999), students with limited short-term memory may have difficulty "holding" ideas in their heads long enough to get them down on paper. Copying skills may also be a weakness as the student is asked "to chunk" and maintain information in short-term memory. These are the students who look up every letter, working very slowly through the entire process.

A good active working memory allows students to keep information or facts "in mind" while working with them. For students whose memory recall is poor, holding onto information while deciding what to write is troublesome. They will likely have difficulty remembering the complete sentence while simultaneously trying to comply with the mechanics of writing They may have trouble working rapidly. Students may have difficulty summarizing and paraphrasing.

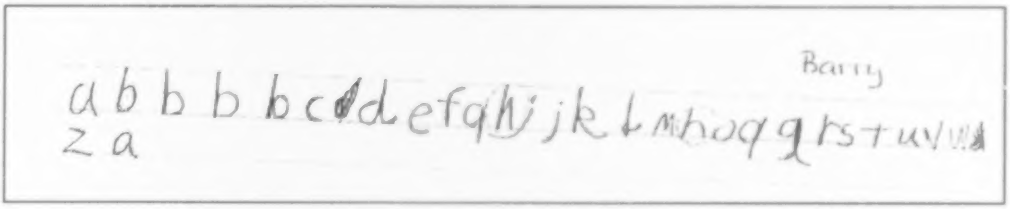
Implement the use of mnemonics (see page 133), advance organizers (see pages 79–88), key words (see page 39), and, perhaps most important, time, in order to ease the burden on some students' memories.



Motor Skills

Problem:

Teacher: "This student's writing is always a mess. He doesn't even keep the letters on the lines, and he reverses so many of the letters all the time. I can't seem to get beyond that when I'm trying to read his work. How can I help him do neater work?"



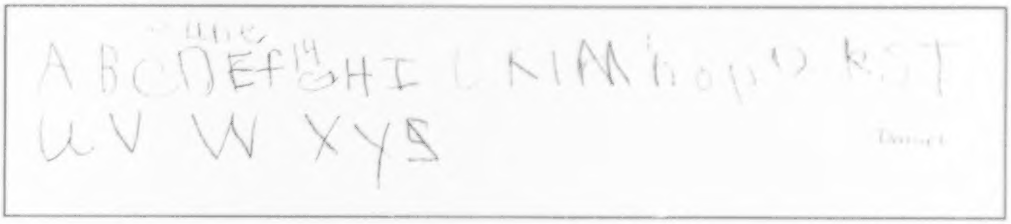
Barry

a b b b b c d d e f g h i j k l m n o q g r s t u v

z a

Analysis:

Note Barry's cross-outs, the inconsistent letter formations, and his efforts at rehearsing *b*'s. Look at his *g* and *i*. Even the letter *i* posed difficulty. Writing is unusually slow and hesitant for this 10-year-old, fourth grade boy.



A B C D E F G H I K L M n o p Q R S T

U V W X Y S

Daniel

Analysis:

Daniel is a third grader who has significant motor-planning and visual-motor difficulties. This alphabet was given as dictation, letter by letter, to "free up" memory for sequences. Letter formations were labored. Note the irregularity of pencil control and pressure. Several letters were started twice, and reversals remain problematic.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Does the student use the standard three-point grip?

- Does the student continue to need models of letters readily available?
- Does the student keep eyes close to the page and watch the pencil tip?
- Is the child's writing posture awkward? Is this student usually awkward himself?
- Is the act of writing more labored and less effective than the act of drawing for this student?
- Do you receive papers from this student with excessive erasures, holes, and write-overs?
- Is the student apprehensive about writing. Does he try to avoid it?
- Does the student form one or more letters differently each time?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, the student may have graphomotor difficulties. Many of these traits are evident in students who struggle to make the pencil move in the right direction. Weak fine-motor or motor-planning skills can have a profound impact on a student's ability to quickly and easily visualize, recall letter formations, and write fluently or eloquently.

Strategies to Try:

- Look through *Help Me Learn to Write* for instructional strategies and activities marked with the ✓ icon.
- Remember, **practice makes permanent**. Students need to learn how to print or write in cursive. It is easier for students to learn the correct way to form letters than it is to recall each and every time. For children like Barry and Daniel (see page 188), letter formations become a series of letter-to-letter decisions about where to place the pencil and in which direction to swing the letter. You will find that if you teach handwriting to your class, writers with graphomotor difficulties will be able to spend more time writing and less time wondering about how to form each and every letter. **Teaching handwriting** is time well spent!
- For students who find it difficult to even hold a writing tool, consider what type of writing implements they are using. We suggest teachers spend some time looking at the **wide variety of pens and pencils** available at most supply stores. (Refer to pages 92–94 for specific suggestions.)

- Keep a **Dictaphone or tape recorder** in your classroom for those students who have difficulties with the physical act of writing. These tools allow students, with or without the aid of a parent, teacher, or classmate, to transcribe their recording at a later time.
- On a rough draft copy, the "**discovery draft**," let students know it is okay to be messy, as long as it is readable. Once students reach the "neat sheet" stage, they can focus more on punctuation, grammar, and legibility, each of which can be a challenging task!

Classroom Modifications:

- Encourage students to **write on every other line** and use only one side of the page when drafting. Simply put an *X* over errors. This will allow students to use the cut-and-paste method, which will help make revision much easier. (See pages 122–123.)
- Easy access to a **model of the ABC's** is both comforting and helpful to struggling writers. Make sure the model you provide is similar to the size in which you expect them to write.
- Encourage struggling writers to use a **computer or keyboard** when composing. Although legible handwriting is important, as mentioned above, word processing can free students from motor, memory, and attention troubles. If students simply need to get the words onto the screen, then allow a classroom aide, parent volunteer, or older student to do the typing while the writer dictates. Note that keyboarding should always be taught separately from the writing process. For students with significant motor delays, consider purchasing voice-activated computers or, again, allow someone else to transcribe for them. (For specific keyboarding programs available for children, see page 93.)

To Consider:

If you note a student's work deteriorating during a given writing period, the student may be having difficulty directing and maintaining her focus. (See Digging Deeper into Organization, page 183.)

You might also consider whether this student has a memory weakness that is inhibiting letter-formation recall. (See Digging Deeper into Memory, page 186.)

Digging Deeper into Motor Skills

If writing is primarily a language-based activity, why do some students have such a difficult time just holding the pencil? Researchers have found that handwriting automaticity—the fluency of letter formations—is a "strong predictor of the quality of composition in normally developing and disabled writers" (Berninger 1999).

Students must be able to write quickly enough to keep pace with their flow of thoughts, and putting letters down on paper should be automatic. While focusing on "*Which direction for the letter* b?" young writers lose this fluency and ability to process thoughts of who, what, when, where, and why.

The physical act of writing requires good muscle coordination in the hands and arms. Graphomotor difficulties arise when the brain does not adequately relay messages to coordinate this movement, and teachers may notice the student using the large muscles of the wrist or forearm, which provide more control than the small muscles of the hand. Children with poor motor feedback, often referred to as finger agnosia, are usually unaware of what their fingers are doing, because signals between the brain and the fingers are weak, and the students receive little kinesthetic feedback. These are the children who intently watch the pencil tip, trying to "steer it" into the correct letter.

Dyspraxia is a term that refers to motor planning, the brain's ability to coordinate muscles. This is our memory for procedures—the memory for "how-to's"—tying shoes, driving a car, or forming letters. Motor planning is a graphomotor function that enables writers to quickly and easily sequence muscle movement.

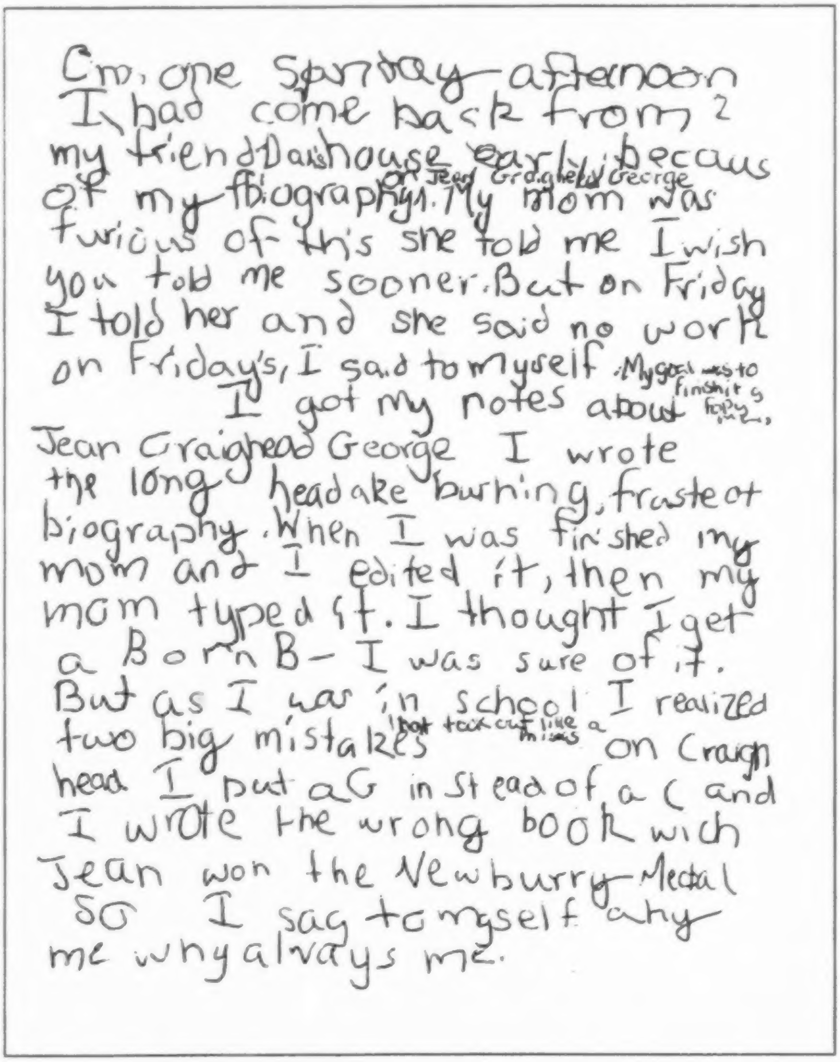
A breakdown in motor planning results in slow, labored writing. Watching these children write, you would notice inconsistencies in letter formation, cross-outs, multiple erasures, and poor legibility. Copying is a slow, inaccurate, and painful process. Students' spelling, letter order, and syllabication skills may be impacted when motor sequencing delays are present. Writing may seem to be "disorganized."

Writing becomes slow and tiring for these students. This is sufficient reason to dislike writing. Don't be misled, however, because your messiest writers might be gifted artists! Differing neurological processes allow many of these same students to be mechanically or artistically inclined.

Aversion

Problem:

Teacher: "Christopher will do anything to get out of writing! He sharpens his pencil, goes to the bathroom, or cleans out his desk! When I look over at him, he's often just staring down at the blank page in front of him. He also never volunteers to share with the group."



Cm, one Sunday afternoon
I, had come back from 2
my friend Dan's house early, becaus
of Jean Craighead George
of my biography. My mom was
furious of this she told me I wish
you told me sooner. But on Friday
I told her and she said no work
on Friday's, I said to myself. My goal was to finish it's
I got my notes about
Jean Graighead George I wrote
the long headake burning, frusteot
biography. When I was finished my
mom and I edited it, then my
mom typed it. I thought I get
a B or n B- I was sure of it.
But as I was in school I realized
two big mistakes that took out like a [illegible] on Craigh
head I put a G in stead of a C and
I wrote the wrong book wich
Jean won the Newburry Medal
so I sag to myself why
me why always me.

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Analysis:

Christopher completes very little writing during writing time. He has written phrases instead of complete sentences. Several of the letters have been retraced or drawn instead of written quickly and easily. He provides very little description and no evidence to indicate he cares about his subject at all.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Is the physical act of forming letters difficult for the student?
- Does this student have difficulty spelling?
- Is verbal expression difficult for this student?
- Is there a possibility that he could be anxious about revealing too much about himself in his writing? Is he embarrassed to share his writing? Is he afraid that one of his peers might laugh at him?
- Has the student experienced success as a writer in the past?
- Does he feel capable of doing the assigned task? Does he have confidence in himself as a writer?
- Is the student interested in the topic on which he is writing? Did he pick it?
- Can the student see a real purpose for his writing efforts? Does he sense its importance?
- Will there be an audience (other than the teacher) for his finished piece of writing?
- Will he have a chance to publish?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, the student you're concerned about most likely has an aversion to writing. People have aversions to any number of situations in life, and, unfortunately, there is often no set cause or solution.

There are many possible reasons for a student to dislike and not want to participate in the writing process, from feeling uncomfortable (either physically, due to weak motor skills, or emotionally) to sensing little or no purpose in the activity. Try to select the strategies from the following list that best address the specific concerns you have for your student.

Strategies to Use:

- **Teach the student to type** and encourage him to write at the computer. Do not use writing time as a practice time for handwriting, instead.
- **Serve as the student's "writing assistant/secretary"** and interview him about his topic. Write down a list of the key ideas he was able to tell you. Give him those notes to use as a resource. (Sticky notes work very well for this purpose.)
- Use some of the **language activities** on pages 39–40 to help the student generate ideas, choose the right words, and elaborate on what he has already written. (See Ideation, pages 175–178, for more information on how to help students elaborate on their ideas.)
- Find out what students are interested in, and assist the student whose language skills are weak to express his ideas in writing by first **tapping into his own prior knowledge** on a particular topic.
- Establish a **regular time for writing** in your daily schedule. Be consistent so the students can rely on a set amount of time. (Most students will benefit from a regular schedule, but for some reluctant writers it is crucial that they have that consistency.)
- **Write with your students** and then be brave and **share something personal**—for instance, the time you cried because your dog died. This will pave the way for them so that they might take a risk and begin to share important things with each other. Promoting a safe atmosphere in which the children can write and share is essential!

Classroom Modifications:

- Provide a **variety of writing utensils** and pencil grips in an easily accessible place so that anyone who experiences discomfort when writing can use them. Also make a variety of paper available—everything from index cards to chart paper! (See Motor Skills, pages 188–191, for more ideas on how to help students with weak motor skills.)

- Make resources such as **Spellexes**, **thesauruses**, and **dictionaries** readily available to all students, especially those who have difficulty in the areas of spelling and phonological awareness.
- **Spelling Editor of the Day!** Set up the opportunity for students to take turns being the "Spelling Editor of the Day!"(You could even provide a special pin for the editor to wear on his/her special day!) On this day students are allowed to ask the editor how to spell unknown words presented on little slips of paper or sticky notes. Don't worry—experience has shown that only the good spellers volunteer for the job! (See pages 131–134 for more information about helping children with language-processing and phonological awareness issues.)
- **Word walls** will help the student with a language weakness find the right word more easily.
- **Promote privacy during writing time**. Do not force people to share what they have written. Let your class know that you hope everyone will feel comfortable and be ready to share with the group eventually, but be ready for the fact that some children may find sharing to be a very difficult task.
- Allow your struggling writer to **choose her own topic** as often as possible, even if it's a choice within an assigned topic. If your goal for this student is that she become more relaxed about writing (and even grows to enjoy it), you've got to "hand the reins over to her" and step back so that she can feel ownership.

To Consider:

It is possible that any one or a combination of areas of difficulty that we have mentioned may be having more of an impact on the student's ability to write than is apparent at first glance.

Digging Deeper into Aversion: Social Issues and Ownership

There may exist one or several difficulties associated with a student's aversion to writing. Most published authors admit that they often have to "trick themselves" into getting started. They also discuss the fact that they need a routine to follow in order to produce good written work. Solving a student's problem of avoidance and aversion might be as simple as providing a regularly scheduled time to write—one that he can count on and expect. Knowing *what* to expect and *when* to expect it may help a student focus for a specified amount of time. He may even enjoy it!

Some students who have an aversion to writing may also have weak language production, slowing their ability to generate written language almost to a *grinding halt*! Of course the student tries to avoid such a difficult and unpleasant situation. He needs to find strategies that help his language flow more easily. (See Digging Deeper into Language: Ideation, page 177.)

> *"One of the reasons people stop learning is that they become less willing to risk failure."*
> —**John W. Gardner**

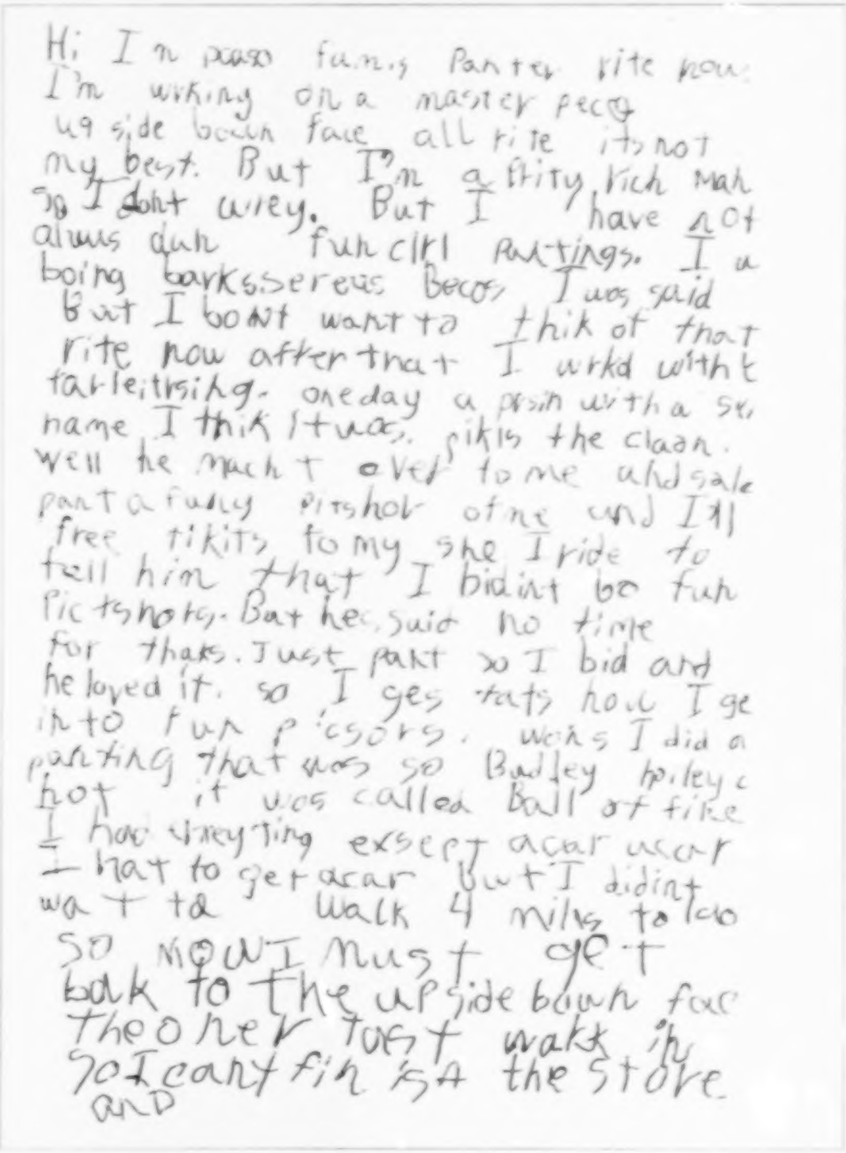
The reluctant writer may feel disconnected to his writing and, therefore, to his own thoughts and feelings. This is a common problem in classrooms where the teacher is in total control, expecting students to write essays about topics of little concern or interest to them. In this type of classroom the students come to view themselves as machines, just turning out a product and, as a result, they often break down. Without feeling ownership of or control over a situation, many students (and many adults) will have no motivation to work on the sometimes *very difficult* task of writing. In this situation the teacher needs to give up some control and allow students to find their voices while writing about topics that are important to *them*. When a person is searching for meaning and then trying to communicate it to others, he is much more likely to be willing to invest his time and energy into the project.

Finally, the student may suffer from anxiety due to the fear of disapproval, or even worse, *laughter*, from his peers. As a child, is there anything worse? Would you continue down such a humiliating path? It is vital that the atmosphere in the writing classroom be accepting and safe.

Dysgraphia

Problem:

Teacher: "This child has so many problems when it comes to writing that I'm not even sure how or where to begin helping him."



Hi I n paso funis Panter rite now
I'm wrking on a master pecg
uq side bown face all rite its not
my best. But I'm a ftity rich mah
so I dont wrey. But I have a of
alws dun fun clrl Partings. I a
boing barkssereus Becos I was said
But I bont want to thik of that
rite now after that I wrkd witht
farleitrsing. oneday a prsin with a st
name I thik It was. sikis the claan.
well he macht over to me and sale
pant a funy pitshor of me and I'll
free tikits to my she I ride to
tell him that I bidint bo fun
Pictshors. But hes suid no time
for thars. Just pant so I bid and
he loved it. so I ges tats how I ge
in to fun picsors. wons I did a
panting that was so Budley hoiley c
hot it wos called Ball of fike
I hav vreyting exsept acar acar
I hat to get acar but I didint
wat ta walk 4 mils to lco
SO NOW I must get
bak to the upside bown fac
the oher tost wakk in
so I cant fin is A the store
and

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Analysis:

In this writing sample, Zachary, a third grader, was given a prompt: to write about a famous person. Note the strength in his creative expression as he "becomes" Pablo Picasso. Conceptually, this student is able to step into the famous painter's shoes to talk about his works of art. Unfortunately, the mechanics of writing—his spelling, letter formations, word spacing, and omission of words—seriously interfere with his message.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

Do you have one or more students who:

- Struggle with the mechanics of writing? Poor spelling, spacing, letter formation, and/or use of punctuation can take away from the meaning and put the focus on the more superficial aspects of writing.
- Write with brevity and a lack of organization? (Their ideas may be short, with little elaboration.)
- Have difficulty writing from beginning to middle to end? (They may simply list their ideas.)
- Have trouble with planning and revision?
- Are consistently inconsistent?

If in a sampling of this student's work you find some of the recurring themes mentioned above, the student may have a learning disability. Dysgraphia is a term often used to refer to a kind of learning disability.

Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder. It means *writing difficulty*. This can be related to difficulties generating and putting ideas down onto paper, poor spelling, or trouble with the physical act of holding the pencil and forming the letters. For these students, taking more time or copying it over again and again will lead to little improvement. They require specific instruction in their area(s) of weakness. Some students will be able to work successfully within a regular classroom program, while others may require support through Special Education.

Strategies:

- If you believe that a student is struggling with a learning disability, **request a full, multidisciplinary evaluation**. Finding out about a child's learning style, strengths, and weaknesses will help you to address appropriately his unique learning needs.
- Rather than focus on the mechanics of writing, **teach students the steps of the writing process**. Help them learn how to brainstorm, research, organize, compose, revise, edit, and publish. By having your struggling writers work through gradual steps, they should feel less anxious about writing. And if students are more relaxed, they may be better able to learn how to develop and express their ideas, producing quality compositions along the way.
- Some students work very well in **cooperative situations**. Encourage students to form writing groups, and watch these students (and their writing) flourish! That extra support is just what they need.
- No child wants to be accused of being lazy or of not trying. **Keep comments positive** and point out any and all areas of improvement.
- Provide **separate writing grades**—one for content and one for mechanics.
- Put a strong emphasis on guiding your struggling writers to seek help through **conferencing** with teachers or peers.
- Provide the student with a tape recorder or Dictaphone. The student can dictate ideas, then listen and write them down later. Teachers may wish to scribe for the student or ask the student or parent to type out what s/he hears on the recorder.
- These students need practice using the keyboard. This practice should be separate from written assignments.
- Find authentic reasons for writing. Students with a writing disability need added motivation for writing—a real purpose.
- Refer to specific icons throughout this book for information regarding the difficulties your students may be having, in addition to specific teaching strategies and activities.

Classroom Modifications:

- Help students **recognize areas of strength and weakness** related to their writing skills. Look carefully to determine if their writing contains good ideas but looks "bad" because of significant spelling errors. Analyze writing samples carefully and give students the belief that there are areas in the written language in which they *are* successful.
- Reduce the amount of writing required, but maintain a high standard of expectation. **Look for quality, not quantity**. Make this a private agreement between the student and you.
- **Allow for oral responses to questions on tests**. A tape recording may be used. This format automatically requires more time, which works to the advantage of students who might otherwise be anxious. Research papers, in the place of exams, also allow the student to spend more time giving their responses and polishing their work.
- Close communication and a good working **relationship between home and school** will send an important message to students and parents. Hopefully everyone involved will appreciate and benefit from this support.

"If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they [sic] learn."

—Ignacio Estrada

Digging Deeper into Dysgraphia

Problems with the written language occur on a continuum. Some students may show subtle delays in one area while others may have more marked difficulties. When a student struggles with multiple aspects of writing over time, teachers should suspect a possible learning disability.

> Our relationship with words is rooted in unpredictability. One moment we are Abraham Lincoln composing a Gettysburg Address, and the next moment we are as clumsy with words as a boy on his first date. (*Hallowell and Ratey 1994*)

Dysgraphia is a term often used to refer to a learning disability exclusive to writing. It is a disorder in which a student's writing skills fall far short of those expectations typical of her grade/age and intellectual and educational background.

As with dyslexia, there is a perception that students with dysgraphia "see" and "write" the letters backwards or reversed. Current research does not support this belief. For dysgraphic students, letters may be reversed due to motor-sequencing difficulties; other students, such as Amelia (see page 172), have language-processing weaknesses that interfere with written expression. For students with weak oral expression, written expression only compounds the weakness. Students with severe attention or organizational issues may have great ideas that flow too quickly for their hands to write. Others may have insufficient short-term memory to retain ideas long enough to write them down.

A struggling writer cannot, however, "*have* dysgraphia." It is, rather, a general term used to label students who are experiencing difficulties in writing. Therefore, instead of telling a parent her child "has dysgraphia," provide the specific issues with which that parent's child is struggling—language, motor skills, memory, attention, organization. Given this knowledge, teachers can tailor instruction to help the dysgraphic student who has a particular writing disability make gains and become a successful writer.

GLOSSARY

dyspraxia: refers to motor planning, the brain's ability to coordinate muscles. This is often noted as a lack of coordination when performing a physical act and may affect gross-motor and/or fine-motor movements. Motor planning is a graphomotor function that enables writers to sequence muscle movement quickly and easily.

executive function: a term used to describe the brain's ability for previewing, predicting, pacing, planning, self-monitoring, and attending to stimuli selectively.

finger agnosia: poor kinesthetic feedback that inhibits a child's awareness of where his fingers are located in space. Often, children with this difficulty "watch" to see their pencil movements as they write.

graphomotor: describes motor activity that involves the fingers and use of a pen or pencil. Weaknesses may be noted when the small muscles of the hand and fingers are unable to coordinate the fine movement of the pencil.

ideation: the ability to generate ideas and thoughts. Some students may have difficulty developing and elaborating on a topic or generating ideas for research. Creative or imaginative thought may be limited, and students with weak ideation may demonstrate terse and abbreviated writing.

metacognition: an understanding of the ways we think and learn. A good awareness leads to more effective learning through self-questioning and self-monitoring of strategy use.

phonological awareness: the ability to recognize and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in words. Oral directions and instruction may be difficult for children with phonological weaknesses, and decoding/encoding (spelling) skills are often notably weak.

scaffolding: a system of support put into place by the teacher, perhaps with student input, that allows a student to complete a task that could not be completed without this support. This type of temporary assistance might include demonstration, guidance, and/or provision of materials.

word retrieval: the ability to rapidly and effectively call up words from memory, to name specific items or express specific thoughts. Children with delays in this area are at risk for developing problems with reading and writing. They may rely on the most basic words, such as *stuff* and *thing*.

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